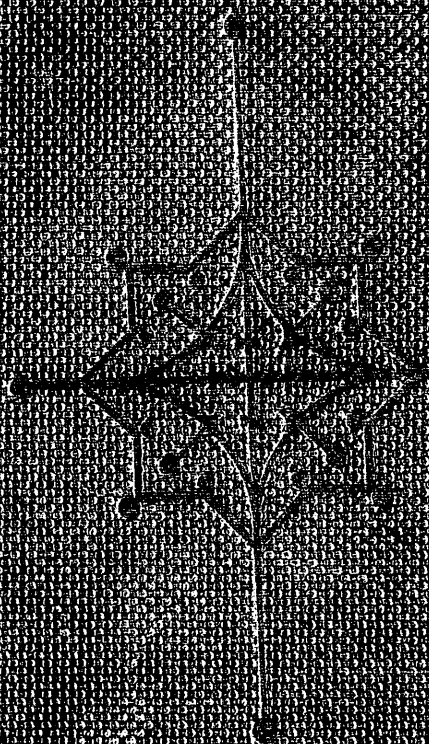


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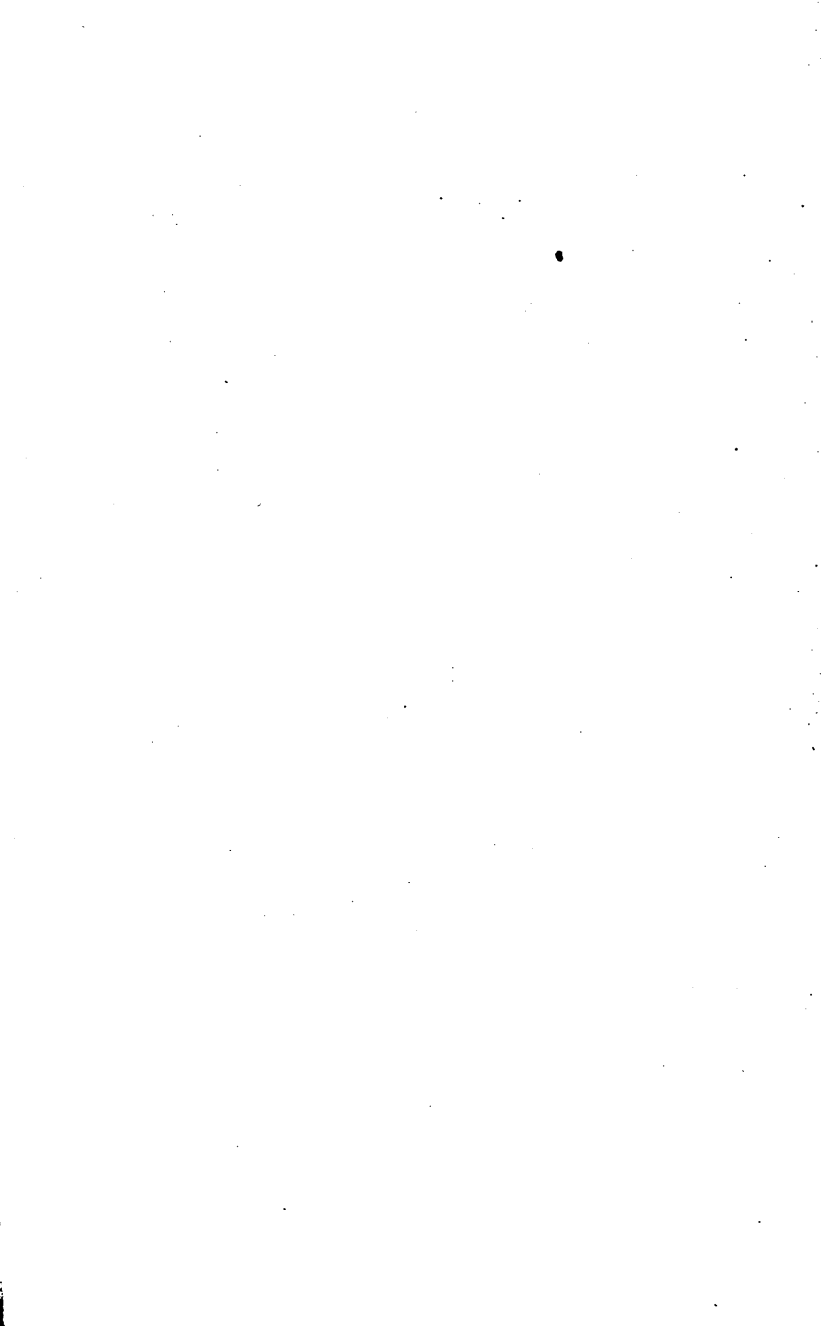
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EARTHLY AND HEAVENLY THINGS.



EARTHLY AND HEAVENLY THINGS;

OR,

THE, TRUTHS UNFOLDED BY OUR LORD

IN HIS

INTERVIEW WITH NICODEMUS.

BY

REV. JAMES GRIERSON, D.D.,

ERROL.

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P R E F A C E.

THE following Volume presents the embodiment of the thoughts and illustrations which were suggested to the Author, many years ago, by the studious examination of that remarkable passage in which the Evangelist John has recorded the solemn and instructive interview between our Lord and Nicodemus.

After repeated revisal, with numerous additions and improvements, the work has, in the prospect of publication, been carefully transcribed, and much of it recomposed. Though dealing with some of the most peculiar and sublime doctrines of the Christian Faith, it is to be considered, not as a critical or merely theological treatise, but as one intended to aid in the enterprise of winning souls to Christ, and in the promotion of practical godliness. The writer wishes both his readers and himself to feel that they have to sit, with reverence and earnestness, at the feet of Jesus, while they hear Him discoursing to the Jewish ruler, and, through that inquirer to themselves, on the nature and necessity of the new-birth,—on the mysterious incarnation of the Son of God,—on the depths of redeeming love,—on the way in which sinners become partakers of eternal life,—and on

the way in which they add to their condemnation by rejecting the Saviour.

These are most momentous, and ought to be most interesting subjects,—particularly in times, like the present, of religious *awakening and revival*. Often as they have been urged on the serious attention of his hearers, in the course of a lengthened ministry, such, in the estimation of the writer, is their paramount importance, that every successive year serves only more emphatically to proclaim it. In the advanced period of his official labours, he may be permitted to say, that he is desirous to reach, through the press, a larger number of souls than those to whom he can expect to have any access through the pulpit. Looking up, therefore, for the Lord's blessing, he owns the call, and feels the obligation of diligently using whatever means he may possess for unfolding the preciousness, and enforcing the acceptance of the "great salvation,"—being, all the while, animated, as well as solemnized by the language of the Saviour himself:—"I must work the works of Him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work."

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EARTHLY AND HEAVENLY THINGS.

INTRODUCTION.

JOHN III. 1, 2.

WHILE our Lord was in Jerusalem, during the first Passover which occurred after the commencement of his ministry, he performed such miracles as induced many to believe in him. Notwithstanding the impression, however, which these miracles had made on them, their professions of belief were not altogether to be trusted. It would appear that there was among them such a want either of sincerity or of steadfastness, that Jesus, who thoroughly knew all men, and all that was in the heart of man, "did not commit himself unto them."

An instance both of the convincing effect of these miracles of our Lord, and of his perfect knowledge of the human heart, is furnished to us in the case of Nicodemus. This individual was a Pharisee, a member of the Sanhedrim, or National Council, and a master or teacher in Israel. He was the only person of his rank, and by far the most distinguished of his sect, who had hitherto discovered any readiness to believe in Jesus. The chief priests and Pharisees, long after this period, priding themselves in their refusing to believe, haughtily

said to those who expressed admiration of His discourses, "Have any of the rulers, or of the Pharisees, believed on him?" And it is well known that they continued to the last his most inveterate enemies. Such, however, was the impression made on the mind of Nicodemus by the wonderful works of our Lord, that, notwithstanding the general contempt of his order, he was convinced that the author of these works was, at least, a teacher sent from God; and he was desirous to obtain, by a personal interview with him, more particular information respecting his doctrines and pretensions. Yet, although he was thus distinguished for his rank, and for his desire to be instructed, as well as for the homage which he paid to the credentials which Jesus had exhibited—he was either ashamed or afraid to consult him openly, and thought it more prudent to repair to him by night, when the shelter of darkness might screen him from observation. He "came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him."

It is impossible to deny that Nicodemus, by the manner of his coming to Jesus, showed that he was influenced by "the fear of man which bringeth a snare;" but whether he was naturally timid, or whether he was under peculiar temptations from the office and the station which he occupied, he is not to be denied the credit of having earnestly sought a private conference with that gifted Instructor whom the generality around him contemptuously slighted. Nor must it be forgotten that, on a subsequent occasion, and as a proof of the readiness with which his prejudices had yielded to the force of truth, he spoke to the other rulers in defence of Jesus, when for so doing, he was sneeringly asked,

“Art thou also of Galilee?” It must be remembered, too, that though, on his coming to Jesus, his profession of belief extended no farther than to His being a teacher with a divine commission, Jesus had not as yet declared himself to be the Messiah; and that though Nicodemus did not possess a mind so enlightened, and a faith so matured, as to discover, by a comparison of the signs which were exhibited with the prophecies which existed, that, notwithstanding the humble guise in which this teacher appeared, he was really none else than the Great Prophet who was to arise, and the very Christ of God—yet that there appears to be every reason to suppose that he had a secret impression that this was the case. One purpose of his visit was, perhaps, to obtain information on this very subject; and as he himself avowed that the individual whom he came to consult was a messenger of the infallible God, we have good ground to conclude that he would have been satisfied with the solemn averment of Jesus himself, as to this important particular. Amidst all the remaining prejudices, indeed, and all the imperfections which he betrayed, he manifested, on the whole, a humble and teachable disposition. To this our Lord has borne the most honourable testimony, by the welcome and condescending reception which he gave him, though he came to him in a manner which showed the partial nature and limited measure of his faith.

As soon as Nicodemus, on his entering into the presence of our Lord, had stated his firm and well-founded conviction that He was a teacher invested with divine authority, the latter said to him, in reply, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” This remark was made in that peculiarly solemn and emphatic manner

which Jesus was accustomed to observe with respect to things of more than ordinary importance; and yet, on the present occasion, his abruptness is scarcely less striking than his solemnity. How true and important soever the remark in itself must be held to be, it is by no means obvious by what circumstance it was immediately suggested, or what it was which rendered it both natural and seasonable. Perhaps our Lord was advert- ing to the circumstance that, though Nicodemus, in consequence of the miracles which he had seen and heard of, had attained to the conviction already stated, he had attained to nothing more; and that thus he had manifested his incapacity for discovering that Jesus was the Christ, and for discerning the nature of that king- dom which, according to prophecy, He was ordained to establish.

On this supposition, the remark must be understood to intimate, that in order to such a discovery and discernment, it is necessary that a man be born again; and then the remark will be, in some respects, equivalent to that which our Lord afterwards made to Simon Peter, on his recognising him to be "the Christ—the Son of the living God." "Flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven." It will be equivalent also to the observation which the Apostle Paul made to the Corinthians, "That no man can say that Jesus Christ is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost." Or, perhaps, our Lord, without any immediate allusion to the limited belief of his visitor, and receiving his profession of faith just as it had been made, began to state to him, as a person who was applying for in- struction, and who had hailed him as a teacher peculiarly qualified and divinely commissioned to give it, some of those truths which, besides being in themselves of

universal and unspeakable importance, were peculiarly calculated to meet and remove the existing prejudices under which the inquirer and his countrymen laboured. It was probably by showing, in this manner, that he knew what was in man, that he produced in Nicodemus so thorough a conviction as seems to have been the result of this interview. It seems evident that the latter had no slight anxiety on his mind respecting the Messiah ; and he must have been struck with the circumstance, that, though he put no question on the subject, the most important information on it was given to him. He must have felt that both his inquiries and his objections were anticipated in such a way as to evince that Jesus was most intimately acquainted with all his sentiments and thoughts; and this feeling must have very much deepened the impression made on him by the sublime and sacred communications with which he was favoured.

Be these things as they may, Jesus, let it be observed, was here addressing himself, at the very outset of his ministry, to one who acknowledged him to be "a teacher come from God," and one who, according to the desire which he had humbly intimated, had been graciously admitted to hear the precious doctrines which such a teacher might be appointed to unfold and inculcate. And, if we may judge of their relative importance to fallen man, from the prominence which he gave them in his discourse to Nicodemus, none can be esteemed more important than the one with which he emphatically *begins*, and which states the absolute necessity of being "born again," before we can enter into, see, or enjoy the kingdom of God.

CHAPTER I.

REGENERATION.

JOHN III. 3-10.

THERE can be little doubt that by the phrase "the kingdom of God," our Lord here intended to denote the gospel kingdom—that kingdom of grace which God, by his Son, was about to establish, and concerning the nature and Founder of which, so many misconceptions prevailed. But as the kingdom of God on earth is introductory to his kingdom in heaven, and as the latter is, at least, as difficult of discernment as the former,—of the subjects of which, indeed, it is to be composed,—there can be as little doubt that whatever is necessary for our understanding or our entering into the one, must be equally necessary for our understanding or our entering into the other. And even though this were not the case, it would not, in the slightest degree, affect the necessity of the change which is here denominated a being "born again." Whatever we understand by the kingdom of God, the positive statement of our Divine Master is—that no one who is not born again can either enter or thoroughly discern it; and surely when this new birth is thus solemnly and unequivocally declared, on the authority of God himself, to be absolutely essential to our being of the number of his children on earth, or of his saints in heaven, it deeply concerns us to ascertain, if possible, what it is, and whether or not the change

which it implies has passed upon *us*. Happily for this purpose, our Lord has, in his discourse to Nicodemus, referred to its nature and its production, as well as to its necessity; and the whole subject has received many illustrations in the writings of his apostles.

THE NATURE OF REGENERATION.

From the explicit and unqualified language which our Lord employed in at once announcing the necessity of being born again, Nicodemus clearly perceived that it was a necessity which existed with respect to himself, and with respect to all the descendants of the house of Israel, no less than with respect to the families of the Gentiles. He did not in the first instance, therefore, entertain, as he otherwise might have entertained, the idea that the regeneration spoken of referred to a proselytism, or conversion to the religious creed of the Jews, for this was professed by thousands already; nor did he imagine that it referred to the adoption of any other creed, for this would have implied an abandonment of his own. Accordingly, we find that he took up the language of our Lord in its most literal acceptance,—expressing at the same time, the surprise and the difficulty which attended this view of the matter. “How can a man,” he exclaimed, “be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born?” This were, indeed, an insuperable difficulty, had this view of the change been correct.

I. To avoid this difficulty, there have been some, in the first place, who supposed that, by this second birth, our Lord taught only the necessity of all men being converted to the profession of that new and perfect system of religious truth which he himself was to introduce.

Such persons imagine that this embraces the whole of what his language was intended to describe. Were this the case, it would imply that a most extravagant figure of speech had been used. But we are assured that "the kingdom of God is not meat and drink ; but righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." There is, in the Scriptures, the most marked distinction made between the mere professors of the gospel and the people of God. None are considered as properly the subjects of the Messiah, but those "who obey him ;" and it is most solemnly asserted by the Apostle, that, "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." Every one is not a disciple "who is one outwardly ;" and our Lord himself has positively declared that, at the great day of judgment, he will say to many who have not only professed his gospel, but in his name done many wonderful works, "Depart from me ; I never knew you,"—never owned you to be mine.

It is most readily allowed that the prejudices and misconceptions of the Jews were such as prevented them from discerning the kingdom of the Messiah. They imagined that he was to appear among them as a mighty conqueror, to be the restorer of their liberties and the enlarger of their glory. Fancying that his kingdom should be altogether of this world, they also flattered themselves that none should be admitted into it but the genuine descendants of Abraham, whom they boasted of having for their father. Far from supposing that a new dispensation of religion was to be introduced, they firmly believed that all the ordinances of Moses were to be most scrupulously maintained. All these prejudices, however, required to be done away or subdued, before they could perceive the true character of Christ and of his kingdom, and before they could be persuaded to

adopt, as their exclusive system of belief and of observances, that unostentatious Gospel, which was commanded to be preached among all nations.

It must further be allowed that, in the existing creeds and customs of all these other nations, there was much, nay, almost everything, to prejudice the minds of men against the adoption of a religion which, because it was the purest and the most perfect of all, would not admit of fellowship or amalgamation with any other. Before its adoption by any of the Gentiles could take place, a *change* still more remarkable, if possible, than in the case of the Jews, must necessarily be effected. All this will not only be granted, but is most particularly insisted on, —forming, as it does, one of the strongest evidences that can be adduced of the divine origin and support of that religion which, in spite of it all, and with the aid of human means the most inadequate, was “preached unto the Gentiles, and *believed on* in the world.”

But these concessions do not serve the argument of those who maintain that such a change as that which has just been mentioned, is *all* that is implied in the phrase “born again,”—unless it can be shown that the religion of Jesus has never been credibly embraced by any person or people, without their profession being amply attested by their exhibition of all the graces which it inculcates, and by their becoming “holy in all manner of conversation.” The argument assumes, what is contrary to experience, that all who receive the benefit of a Christian education, and who do not either renounce the doctrines which they have been taught, or exclude themselves from the outward privileges in which so many thousands participate, are fully entitled to be considered as subjects of God’s kingdom of grace on earth, and, consequently, as heirs of his kingdom of glory in heaven.

It assumes that all who are members of the visible Church are members also of the Church invisible ; or rather it explodes this as a useless distinction, and plainly asserts that the children of such professors, instead of needing to be born again before they can enter into the kingdom of God and of the Gospel, are in it already, and have been in it all along.

Of such assumptions and assertions it is useless to attempt any refutation. The Scriptures already quoted or referred to, are amply sufficient to destroy their authority ; and, in prosecuting our investigations into this subject, we shall see yet more clearly that, by being "born again," something very different indeed is meant from the outward profession of the gospel,—from the renouncing of one creed and the adoption of another, how much soever it may be superior in its credentials and its excellence.

II. This phrase, however, let us next observe, has been by others considered as merely a figurative expression for *baptism*. It has been alleged that our Lord, in stating to Nicodemus the necessity of a new-birth, in order to our entering into the kingdom of God, only stated the necessity of being baptized. It is almost as strange as it is lamentable that his language should ever have been thought to countenance a notion which it appears, to an intelligent and unbiassed reader, so completely to preclude. On beginning to explain the general statement which he had made to this inquiring ruler, our Lord said to him, and with all his former emphasis and solemnity, " Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water, and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." That the expression, "born of water," refers to the ordinance of baptism, there is no reason to dispute. There is no

possibility of denying, that, according to the constitution of the gospel kingdom, no man can obtain admittance into it without conforming to this ordinance, as instituted and enjoined by God for this very purpose. As little can it be alleged that any person whatever can be actually a member either of the kingdom of grace, or of the kingdom of glory, without that spiritual baptism, of which the baptism with water is the sacred and sacramental emblem. As far as adults, at least, are concerned, outward baptism, instead of constituting all that is required in order to their entering into the kingdom of God, is merely the divine rite by which their entrance into it is signified and intimated. Instead of constituting them believers, it is, as circumcision was to Abraham, a sign of the faith which they had, being yet unbaptized, or before they were admitted to the privilege of baptism. It is also, at the same time, a seal of the divine promises, according to the covenant of grace. In the case of children, baptism, besides being an emblem of the spiritual purification which they, as well as others, need to undergo, is, like the corresponding ordinance under the law, a token of their descent from, or their connection with those who, having given evidence of Christian faith, are entitled to be regarded as believers. Besides being to them of direct and immediate benefit in regard to the means of grace, which their believing parents are taken bound to employ, it is a pledge on the part of God that the diligent use of these means shall be blessed, and that the children themselves, on manifesting faith or seeking after God, shall find him a reconciled father in Christ Jesus.

Book

But, while the necessity and importance of baptism, according to the view now given of it, are most readily admitted, nothing can ever induce us, against the

plainest dictates of reason and Scripture, to admit that in this consists all that is implied in being "born again." Where this the case, then the phrase "born of the Spirit," though introduced by our Lord into his explanation of the phrase "born again," would be altogether unmeaning or redundant. Yet, instead of there being any countenance given by him to such a supposition, the context fully demonstrates, that on the significant import of that phrase, the whole force of the explanation depends. The very next verse to that in which the explanation is given, evinces that the baptism with *water* is no essential part of the change which had been previously denominated a new, or second birth; and the same thing is evinced by the two verses which immediately follow. To show Nicodemus the uselessness no less than the impossibility of what *he* had fancied to be meant by being born again, our Lord reminded him that, were this literally to take place, the individual must just be as much a partaker of human corruption as before. "That which is born of the flesh," said he, "is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." By this he showed not only the absurdity of the notion which Nicodemus had been led to entertain respecting the new birth, but that it was a birth in direct contradiction to that which he had imagined. And when he comes to designate the being by whom that renovation has been experienced, he calls him "one who is born of the Spirit," thus plainly intimating that although, in formerly speaking of this change, he had combined the expressions, "born of *water*, and of the *Spirit*," the only true birth implied in the change, was one altogether of a spiritual nature; and that the outward ordinance in which water was employed, was only a significant and instituted emblem

—no mere element being calculated to do more than sanctify “to the purifying of the flesh.”

Of the delusion which we have now attempted to expose, there is a modification which stands equally in need of exposure. There are many who too clearly manifest a disposition to entertain the opinion that though mere baptism itself is not all that our Lord intended to express by being born again, the inward change signified by this phrase is so inseparably connected with baptism, as always to take place where that ordinance is solemnly and rightly administered; and that in no case where the ordinance has not been thus applied, can either the change in question, or the salvation of which it is the earnest, be expected. In none of the reformed churches is there any article of faith which was intended either to avow or to admit of such a doctrine; but, notwithstanding this, there can be no doubt that, among the members of some communities which are professedly Protestant, this relic of Popish superstition is still to be found.

That baptism and regeneration are repeatedly spoken of in Scripture as intimately related, it were in vain to deny. An example of this we have in the passage before us, and several others might be produced—particularly that one in which the Apostle says, “According to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.” Titus, iii. 5. In this text, it is generally understood that by “the washing of regeneration,” the Apostle meant the application of water in baptism; but then it is evident that this language was employed merely because the ordinance was so adapted as to be emblematical of that washing or cleansing from sin, of which the renewing of the Holy Ghost is the only proper and immediate cause. In the

same sense must be understood the words addressed to the Apostle himself by Ananias, when the latter was sent to baptize him after his conversion: "Arise, and be baptized, and *wash away* thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord," and thus making a solemn profession of faith in him. So also must the inspired writer be understood, when he states to the Ephesians that "Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water *by the word*." The reason of all this is very plain. Baptism and regeneration are spoken of as connected, not only because the one is the instituted emblem of the other, but also because the baptism most commonly mentioned in Scripture, and alluded to in these passages, was the baptism of adults, or full-grown persons, who, having been brought to believe, and having exhibited signs of being by the Holy Ghost enlightened in the knowledge of Christ, were not only admitted, but enjoined, by means of this emblematical ordinance, publicly to avouch their belief in him, and to signify their desire, as well as their obligation, to "depart from iniquity," and to "walk in newness of life." Of this connection, indeed, there can be no evidence, except when baptism is not administered till there has been a profession—nay, some manifestation of faith by the individual applying to be baptized, and consequently, an equal manifestation that he has been spiritually renewed.

Were it not that some passages are so peculiarly explicit and striking that they cannot be overlooked, it were superfluous to adduce any further evidence that there is no *necessary* or invariable connection between baptism with water and baptism by the Holy Ghost. They are clearly distinguished by the Apostle Peter,

when he speaks of baptism as, "not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God." So they are by the Apostle Paul, when he says, "In Christ Jesus, neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature." "And," again; "circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter." Now, all this may evidently be said, with equal propriety, as to the substituted rite of baptism. But as a conclusive evidence that baptism and the second birth are not only distinct from each other in their nature, but also not necessarily or inseparably united in their existence—or, in other words, that the administration of the one is no certain pledge of the accomplishment of the other—we have only to advert to the case of Simon Magus. That individual, though baptized, after having made a profession of his belief,—and baptized, too, by an inspired man, Philip the deacon and evangelist,—was guilty of proposing to purchase from the apostles the gift of the Holy Ghost. On account of this daring impiety, as well as gross delusion, he was solemnly told by the Apostle Peter that "his heart was not right in the sight of God," and that he was "still in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity." He might, it is true, have, after this, been made a new creature, but if so, the result must have been ascribed, not to his baptism with water, which had plainly left his heart wholly unrenewed, but to that inward baptism of the Spirit, which is altogether independent of the other.

A demonstration of the same truth that we are now considering may be found, alas! in the unsanctified lives of many thousands in every Christian community, who may be justly denominated baptized unbelievers. If, notwithstanding such manifest and habitual ungodliness

of life, baptism be still imagined to be decisive of regeneration, surely it is a regeneration of no value whatever ; and, instead of showing that a man is fitted for the kingdom of God, it proves him to be still as far from it as ever.

There is a remark of our Lord which, when superficially considered, looks very like a vindication of the notion which we are now combating, "He that believeth, and is baptized," said he, on one occasion, to his Apostles, "shall be saved ; but he that believeth not shall be damned ;" that is, condemned, or sentenced to be punished. This remark, however, let us remember, was made by him when, previously to his ascension, he was giving them his commission to "go into all the world, and preach the gospel unto every creature." It was evidently made, therefore, only with respect to those individuals to whom the gospel was actually made known. To the salvation of such individuals, baptism, as well as belief, is, of course, declared to be indispensable. It is just the ordinance to which, on the profession of their belief, they are appointed and required to submit ; and, if they fail or neglect to comply, when the ordinance is scripturally within their reach, they betray their utter destitution of faith itself, and at once give the lie to their profession. Accordingly, it is stated, in the second clause of the remark, that their condemnation, or punishment, is attached to their want of *belief*, without any regard whatever to their not having received baptism, which, under such circumstances, would have been only an additional sin—the heinous sin of profaning a most sacred and solemn ordinance. To receive baptism in such a case, would only aggravate their guilt, rivet their chains, and seal their doom, instead of having any effect in securing their salvation. What can be more

demonstrative than this that there is no necessary and mysterious connexion between outward baptism and genuine faith—between being baptized with water and born of the Spirit!

We cannot, however, leave the topic on which we have been insisting, without entering a caution, lest any should pervert what has been written, and fancy or allege that it tends to lower the importance of the divine ordinance of baptism. Although it is only an ordinance, let us remember that it is one of Divine institution, and that, with a view to the ends for which it was instituted, it must ever be esteemed in the highest degree important. Surely it detracts nothing from its dignity to say that it is not equivalent to the renewing of the Holy Ghost; or to say that, though the sign, and to believers the seal, of this renovation, it may often be applied without the actual presence or manifestation of the thing which is signified. For though all this is true, yet we have the authority of an inspired apostle for stating, that even the miraculous reception of the Holy Ghost did not supersede the administration of baptism, but, on the contrary, constituted the very reason why it ought to be administered without delay. When Peter found that, while he had been preaching the gospel to Cornelius the centurion, and to those who were assembled with him, the gift of the Spirit had fallen on them all—Gentiles though they were—he exclaimed, “Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, who have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord.”

III. It is impossible, we think, that either of the views which have now been considered can be successfully maintained. Are we then, in the third place, to

suppose that, when our Lord spoke of being "born again," all that he meant was a thorough reformation of life and manners? It is beyond all question that, with respect not only to many errors of doctrine, and many abuses and delusions as to ordinances, but with respect also to manifold sins and unrighteous practices, the Jews, in the time of our Lord, were generally very unfit for the kingdom of God. They were much addicted to avarice, uncharitableness, envy, and revenge; to licentiousness and ungodliness, concealed, though these often were, under the devices of formality and hypocrisy. In order to their entering into the kingdom of God, it was unquestionably necessary that these and such like sins should be abandoned, and that their conduct should undergo a decided reformation. The same necessity existed with respect to every other nation and kindred of mankind, for among all of them similar iniquities prevailed. Nay, their prevalence even among professing Christians must be allowed to be, on the supposition which we are now examining, quite demonstrative, notwithstanding their profession, that they are not yet, in reality, members of the Gospel commonwealth. In their case, consequently, not less than in the case of the Jews, and of the unenlightened heathen, a mighty change as to moral conduct must be effected, before they can be regarded as true citizens and subjects of the kingdom.

Thus far, undoubtedly, the supposition is according to fact. It is clear that the new birth of which our Lord in this passage spoke, implies such a purity of morals, and such a propriety of deportment, as that to which we have just been adverting. But the question is—Is this all that it implies? Is the absence or the renouncement of such immoralities as prevailed among the Jews of that period—are the restraint, the caution, and the

decorum of the moralist and man of virtue—all that is essential to the change which Jesus denominates being born again? and all, therefore, that he pronounces to be requisite for entering into the kingdom of God? It is too plain to need any proof, that much which is lovely, honourable, and of good report, may be found in human character, while love to God—the grand principle of Christian affection—is totally wanting. It were absurd to deny that all men have some impressions as to the obligations of truth, justice, humanity, and benevolence; or that many examples can be produced of temperance, generosity, and self-denial; and it is impossible not to regard any of these qualities with very different feelings from those with which we regard their opposites. At the same time, nothing is better ascertained than that these qualities may be exhibited in the lives of men who are influenced by considerations the very reverse of those by which the children of the kingdom are understood and bound to be influenced. It is most readily granted, too, that many instances can be produced of what are well entitled to the name of *reformati*—instances in which, by a certain force of mind, individuals, after being long habituated to vicious practices, and unrestrained indulgences, have adopted a sudden or a deliberate resolution to forsake them, and have, under circumstances peculiarly trying, adhered to it with a remarkable and honourable steadfastness.

Even this decision and fortitude, however, may be evinced while, in the same character, such particulars are to be found as are completely at variance with what the Scriptures describe as the distinguishing attributes of the regenerate. There are many instances in which very striking, beneficial, and commendable improvements of conduct have taken place—in which indi-

viduals have broken off some glaring iniquities and long-continued vices—but where it afterwards became evident that the heart had parted with none of its enmity against God, and that these iniquities and vices had been abandoned—not because they were hated on account of their sinfulness, or because there was at the same time a cordial and predominant detestation of all *other* iniquities and vices. Nay, it was evident that, instead of this holy and habitual abhorrence of all that was contrary to his law, and therefore incompatible with the interests of his kingdom, there was an undiminished attachment and predilection to sin and its pleasures. Such a predilection was, perhaps, the more readily and remorselessly indulged, in things of a less gross and palpable nature, in consequence of their minds being soothed, even into complacency, by the sacrifice which had been made, and the apparent respect which had been shown, to the sober decencies of life. Now, it is obvious that those who have been reformed only in these respects, and to this extent, are far indeed from coinciding in character with “the pure in heart,” of whom our Lord says, that “they shall see God,” and with “the poor in spirit,” of whom he says that “theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

It may often happen, however, that the work of reformation is carried to a much greater extent than is here supposed. It may happen that the pruning-hook is applied, not only to the more unsightly excrescences and the more unshapely branches, but that it has been vigorously levelled at everything superfluous and irregular, and that the whole tree has been so carefully trimmed into shape, and so clothed with seemliness and foliage, that it attracts the admiration of many a passenger, especially among those who had beheld it in its

previous deformity. It may be alleged that a man, by the exercise of his own reason, the perception of his own interests, and the decision of his own judgment, may burst from the bondage of some sinful and pernicious habit, and may steel himself, for a time, against the commission of such acts as are deeper than ordinary in the visible complexion of their guilt. He may adopt and adhere to such a line of conduct as corresponds with the indulgent and flexible rules of duty which are current in the world. Nay, he may arrive at such a state of moral perfection as shall exhibit him to advantage, even in the minutest duties and the most private scenes of life, and as may entitle him, in some sense, to the appellation of a *new* man. Difficult though it is for those who have been accustomed to do evil, to learn to do well, it is not, in one sense, altogether impracticable. The passionate may be so mortified by some instance in which he exposed himself to indignation or pity, that his pride shall, for a long time after, lay his passionate-ness under restraint. Policy, or ambition, or avarice, or the love of praise, may lead to a similar improvement in other points of character. Nay, some of the sins which he may have forsaken may have been of a kind which the eye of another's observation could not detect or pursue. Some of the amendments, therefore, which he may have attained, may have been effected only through the dictates of ungodly alarm, and the promptings of a mind which was still at war with itself, and with that Omnipresent God of whom it is truly and emphatically said, that He "seeth not as man seeth ; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart."

By the influence of no higher motives and principles than such as these, the sensual may sometimes become

temperate ; the fraudulent just ; the selfish liberal ; the haughty condescending ; the oppressive kind ; and the slanderous tender of his neighbour's reputation. The man who, while he held the imputation of falsehood to be sufficient to justify him in the shedding of blood, and who yet thought nothing of practically giving the lie to God, and of openly profaning his reverend and holy name,—may have acquired a guardedness and blamelessness of speech, and may have even betaken himself to the formal observance of that worship which he formerly despised or neglected. He may purpose with himself to correct everything which he knows to be amiss ; and he may go far, though not nearly so far as he fancies, in the execution of his purpose. But the peculiarity of such cases of reformation is, that, while the individual is thus doing and designing, he wants that which would enable him to “go on to perfection.” Not only are his first feelings the most sanguine, and his first prospects the fairest, but the motives which impel, and the principles which sustain him, are not calculated to acquire any increase of strength and stability. The impulse which he obeys, and the endeavours which he makes, depend on circumstances of a temporary nature ; and there is nothing within himself to urge him perseveringly onward, when these circumstances have disappeared. The consequence is, as the history of many a one can attest, that he retrogrades, instead of advancing ; and though the declension appears to be sometimes arrested by the new purposes which he forms, and the fresh activity which he displays, yet these become gradually less frequent and less vigorous. Though he is unwilling to believe, and perhaps incapable of perceiving it, his reformation terminates in little else than a mere lowering of the standard at which he aimed.

This result is often to be observed in the case even of those whose attempts at reformation may be imputed partly to the upbraidings, suggestions, and admonitions of conscience—of conscience, too, enlightened, in some measure, by the word and the Spirit of God, with respect to the duties which they had to fulfil, and the sins which they had to avoid. In the Scriptures, we have accounts of individuals with whom some of the most powerful of the ordinary means of grace were employed, and who, notwithstanding the convictions which were thus produced, continued in the sinful habits in which they had lived. Herod heard the Baptist gladly; but he would not, even at *his* rebuke, dissolve his unhallowed intimacy with Herodias. When Paul, a prisoner, spoke before Felix the Roman governor, and “reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled.” He thus betrayed the deep and strong convictions of a guilty mind; yet his cold and neutralizing answer of procrastination and evasion was, “Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season I will send for thee.” Among professing Christians themselves, we may find many illustrations of the parable in which a son, in answer to his father’s order to go and work in his field, said, “I go, and went not.” What is the history of many but a succession of apostacies and regrets—of resolutions and relapses! All would be happy, and most, if not all, are convinced that there can be no true happiness where there are no earnest and prayerful endeavours to keep the commandments of God. Often do most of those who have in their youth received any impressions of religion, betake themselves, as they fancy, to the preserving of them; but their efforts are impotent and unsteady—and when they are discontinued, “the last state” of such men “is worse

than the first." The case is fitly represented by the history of the seed "which fell upon a rock," and which, "as soon as it sprung up, withered away, because it lacked moisture. These," as hearers, "receive the word with joy, and for a while believe, but in time of temptation fall away." There are thousands whose *convictions* are such as correspond with what is inculcated in the Scriptures of truth, but "who hold the truth in unrighteousness," and who, instead of continuing instant in prayer, that the Holy Ghost would enlighten their understandings, enliven their impressions, and give them a commanding influence over their affections and their wills, are guilty of resisting, vexing, grieving, and quenching that blessed Spirit.

Admitting, however, that the advocates of the view which we are now combating, may steadily maintain the highest state of improvement that they can be supposed to reach, what is it? and how can it fit them for the kingdom of God? They may give themselves credit for a reformation in morals; and, if we think merely of what is seemly, reputable, and, in some respects, beneficial, a reformation they may certainly have achieved. But in what does morality, strictly speaking, consist? Is it not, in a dutiful and affectionate regard to the whole law of God—or rather, to God himself, the author and administrator of the law, whose will it embodies and reveals? When we attend to this, it is evident that no reformation can be the new birth spoken of by our Lord, unless it extend to the heart, and conscience, and will. When he says, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit," he not only demonstrates the uselessness of such a second birth as that to which Nicodemus had been alluding, but also, that there is a wide and essential difference

between the two. It is being "born of the Spirit," and that only, which can enable us to discern, or fit us to enjoy, the kingdom of God.

Till this second birth is accomplished, we are all "in the flesh," as the Apostle expresses it, and "mind the things of the flesh," or are "carnally minded." But he tells us that "the carnal mind is enmity against God : for it is not subject to the law of God, neither, indeed, can be. So then," he adds, in language the most explicit, "they that are in the flesh cannot please God." Now, till the mind is divested of its carnality, and deprived of its enmity against God—or, in other words, till a thorough spiritual change has been effected in the inward man—all the reformation that any individual can attempt or achieve in himself, will be of no avail as to his eternal welfare. And how is such a mind to be thus purified and reconciled? Not, surely, by any spontaneous or inherent energy? for it is inherently carnal. The first cordial movement that it were to make toward anything which is holy, would imply and evince that it had been changed already. Whatever efforts it may put forth, and whatever effects it may produce, one thing must still be lacking, and that the chief. It has neither the power nor the desire to please God; and with none of its efforts or doings, therefore, can He be well pleased. There may be an endless diversity of character among those who are unfit for the kingdom of God. Some, by the help of constitutional and educational advantages, may rise in attainments so far and so conspicuously above others, as to be esteemed, by many, children of the light, while, in the estimation of Him who "seeth not as man seeth," they continue still in darkness. If the tree is corrupt, so also will be the fruit, with whatever care the former may be pruned,

and digged about, and manured, and watered. Nothing but a process of ingrafting can alter the nature of its produce. The river which, in its progress, deposits a great proportion of its sediment, may still retain all the peculiar properties of an impregnated fountain ; and with these it parts not, although, at different points in its course, it exhibits different degrees of transparency and brightness.

The new man of reformation is one whose highest object and noblest distinction is the correction of abuses, the avoidance of transgression, and the observance of such duties as have been previously neglected. His newness of life has evidently respect to his practice rather than to his principles. It is the result of a retracing process, which leaves him, in the leading tendencies of his heart, just such as he originally entered into life. He may become more useful, and more respectable, because exhibiting more regard to the consistencies and proprieties of moral character ; but more free from real guilt and inward pollution he cannot render himself. If, therefore, he was polluted in his very nature and from his very birth, he must, for anything that mere reformation has done, be as polluted still. After the waters of the mountain lake issue from its bosom, it may have been conducted, by the art of man, not only down the first descent and along the neighbouring plain, but over a thousand hills, and through a thousand glens and valleys which divide them, how unequal and irregular soever in their elevations. When it reached the distant and extended city, for the refreshment and comfort of whose crowded inhabitants it was conveyed, it may, in like manner, have been transmitted, in so many smaller streams, to every tenement and turret of the spacious streets and

the narrow lanes, which presented a still greater irregularity of surface. But, in all the windings and undulations of its course, it never can have passed over any summit, or attained to any point, that was one hair-breadth higher than the original outlet from which it flowed. If this be a fair and correct illustration of the history of man in his natural state, or of different individuals compared with one another, then, any renovation not extending to the *heart*, must leave them at an indefinite distance from the kingdom of God. Before any of us can content ourselves with such a renovation as this, it should be proved that, before actual sin has been committed,—before those evil habits to which the hand of reformation needs to be applied, have been contracted—we were in such a moral condition as to be fit, without any change or renovation whatever, for entering into the company of the saints in light. This, however, is what the Word of God defies us to do. The very verses now under consideration declare that, since all of us are “born of the flesh,” so we are all, as such, directly opposite to that which is born of the Spirit; and that, unless we *be* “born of the Spirit,” we can neither be introduced into the kingdom of grace, nor prepared for inheriting the kingdom of glory.

From the preceding observations, it must be sufficiently evident, that the new birth here mentioned is something essentially different, not only from that literal birth which Nicodemus imagined, but also from the adoption of a new and perfect system of religious truth,—from the washing of baptism,—and from any reformation, however extensive, of outward conduct. In all this, however, we have only seen what the new birth is *not*. We have now to show in what it actually consists.

IV. It admits then, we think, of being satisfactorily shown, that, in speaking of our being "born again," our Lord had reference to that great inward, spiritual change,—that constitutional change in the moral and spiritual state of the soul,—by which a man is renewed in the image of Him who created him. It may be observed that, while the first phrase here used by our Lord may justly be translated "born again," and while Nicodemus obviously understood it to convey that idea,—for he spoke of it as equivalent to the expression, "born the *second time*,"—yet that the word itself here translated "again" may, with equal propriety, and more literally, be translated, *from above*. This is the translation of it which has been adopted in many passages of the common version, and the one which occurs in the thirty-first verse of this very chapter, when, speaking of the Christ, the Baptist is represented as saying, "He that cometh *from above* is above all."

This observation is of some consequence in ascertaining the nature of the change referred to by our Lord. There was, as it appeared to the mind of Nicodemus, an obscurity, if not an ambiguity in this first phrase which Jesus employed to denote the change. The phrase itself, at any rate, is susceptible of two renderings—"born again," or "born from above;" and therefore it may be inferred that the only second birth here contemplated is one of *heavenly* origin. This, accordingly, is more plainly intimated in the next phrase, which he introduces as explanatory of the first: "Except a man be *born of the Spirit*, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." The second birth spoken of, is one which is from above; and the Spirit to whom it is ascribed, must there have his peculiar abode. He is evidently intro-

duced as a distinct and personal Agent, of whose existence and dignity Nicodemus is supposed to have been already aware. From the special and emphatic manner in which the Spirit is named, and from the glorious residence and the peculiar agency which are assigned to him, it will not admit of a reasonable doubt that the Being here mentioned is none other than the Eternal Spirit, the third person of the blessed Godhead. Thus much, therefore, may be held as certain respecting the new birth, that, since the Eternal Spirit is the Author of it, it must consist in something which is not more essential to the enjoyment of the kingdom of God than it is beyond the power of any inferior agent to accomplish.

There are other passages, however, which speak, in some respects, more fully as to the change to which the one before us evidently relates. It is to such a change that the Lord God refers when he says, respecting the remnant of Israel, in the language of his prophet Ezekiel, "A new heart also will I give you, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of your flesh, and will give you a heart of flesh"—that is, a heart which is tender, and warm, and feeling, with regard to things spiritual and eternal. "And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them." (Comp. Ezek. xi. 19, and xxxvi. 26, 27, with Jer. xxxii. 39, 40.) To the same effect, in the first chapter of this Gospel, all those to whom power is given by the Son of God to believe on his name, are said to be "born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." Besides the phrase "born of God," we frequently meet with the phrases, "sons of God," and "children of God,"

—all of which are used as perfectly synonymous, or of the same import. Those who are born of the Spirit may justly be said to be born of God, because the Spirit is essentially Divine; and when the latter expression is used, we have only to remember that it is through the Spirit, as the Agent whose special province this is in the scheme of redemption, that the new birth is effected. Now, the texts which we are about to quote, in referring this new, or second birth, to God, point out distinctly several most important circumstances which enable us to judge as to its nature, and to perceive how thorough and fundamental a change that is to which the name regeneration is applied. “Whosoever,” says the Apostle, the writer of the narrative now before us, “Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness, is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.”—“Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth, is born of God, and knoweth God.”—“Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of him.” And, in the last place, the Apostle says, “Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world;” and, “who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God.”

From these texts, then, it appears that, though “all have sinned,” and are, “by nature, the children of wrath,” they who are born of God undergo such a mighty and constitutional change, that they are delivered from the practice and the love of sin. Though formerly “living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another,”

they are taught to "love one another, with a pure heart fervently ; being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." Though formerly "lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God," and engrossed with the things of the world which "lieth in wickedness," they have now been enabled to overcome the world, both as to its allurements and its threatenings. Instead of being any longer "conformed to the world," they have been "transformed by the renewing of their minds." In times past, they have lived in obstinate unbelief ; they have now been taught to believe with all their heart, "that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God," and to look to him and delight in him, as all their salvation and all their desire.

To the same effect speaks the great Apostle of the Gentiles, when, addressing the Galatians, he says, "Ye are the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." And as a proof that it is through the renewing influences of the Holy Ghost that they receive the gift of faith and the privilege of sons, he says, in a subsequent verse, "Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying Abba, Father." The Spirit dwells in those into whose hearts he is sent. They "are led by the Spirit." "They walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." These also, therefore, are results which are implied in being born of God. "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." In reference to such, he is called "the Spirit of adoption ;" and he "beareth witness with their spirit," that they are thus indeed his children.

The birth which is spoken of in such language as this,—the change which is wrought by such an Agent, and manifested by such effects,—may now be seen to

be of no ordinary character. This may, however, be still farther evinced. It is in some passages denominated a *new creation*. We are solemnly assured that, in order to be "in Christ Jesus,"—that is, to be a genuine disciple, or united to him by true faith,—“neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature,” or a new creation. And again: “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.” The Scriptures represent all mankind as “alienated from the life of God;” while, on the other hand, they who have been taught by the Spirit are represented as having their lives “hid with Christ in God;” and so wide and essential is the difference between the moral state of an individual before and after his receiving the gift of faith,—that, in the latter state, he is accounted, with respect to heart and character, as no longer the same man. “I testify in the Lord,” says the Apostle Paul, “that ye put off, concerning the former conversation, the old man, that is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, who after God is created—in knowledge—righteousness, and true holiness.” Here, you observe, that though the putting on of the new man is mentioned in the language of admonition, or as a thing which Christians are required to do, yet that this new man is expressly said to be “created” of God. But, in a previous chapter of the epistle to the Ephesians, from which this quotation is made, the matter is still more forcibly stated, and the change is spoken of as, in the strictest sense, a new creation. “For we are his workmanship, *created* in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” Nay, it is spoken of by another Apostle, as a change so peculiar and important, that, notwithstanding the fright-

ful but faithful picture which the Scriptures have given of the corruption and depravity of human nature in its fallen state, those whom Divine power has enriched with "all things that pertain unto life and godliness" are denominated "partakers of the Divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." This shows in how intimate and exalted a sense they who are "born again" are called and constituted the children of God.

It may help us yet further to understand what is implied in the change which we are examining, to observe that, in some passages, it is spoken of, or alluded to, as a "quickenings" or "resurrection from the dead." In a subsequent chapter of this Gospel, "he that believeth in the Son" is said by the Son himself to have "passed from death unto life;" and the same is said, in another part of the writings of this Evangelist, in regard to all those who "love the brethren." "As Christ," says St. Paul in his epistle to the Romans, "was raised up by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." "Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but *alive unto God* through," or *in*, "Jesus Christ our Lord." In another epistle, he says, "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath *quickened* us together with Christ." And again: "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." The quickening and awakening here mentioned are evidently of a spiritual nature, and imply that those who are quickened and awakened, were previously in a state of such estrangement from God, and of such insensibility to their duty and their danger, as to have no love or reverence for his law, and no hatred of or horror

at sin. When sinners are, by the Spirit of God, delivered out of this state, they are made alive unto God. They receive a principle of spiritual life. They are most alive to everything which concerns his honour, and their own happiness as immortal beings. They love him ; they adore him ; they have continually the fear of him before their eyes. They delight in his law ; they seek a nearer conformity to its requirements ; they devoutly contemplate and humbly endeavour to copy those imitable perfections of his nature which they once regarded with aversion ; and they meditate, with the profoundest reverence, on those glorious and incommunicable attributes which they once regarded only with dread. Looking on Christ as their life, and knowing that he “suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust,” his amazing love in doing so begets in them a love to him in return, and constrains them to live henceforth not unto themselves, but unto him who died for them, and rose again.

The preceding quotations seem to furnish us with the fullest and plainest information that the sacred Scriptures contain, on a subject with respect to which these alone are competent to speak. Now, from the manner in which the change under consideration is spoken of in the passages just referred to, it does not appear that this new birth implies that any essentially new and distinct faculties or powers are imparted to the soul ; although it is obviously intimated, if not positively asserted, that the soul is made the subject of a process which is altogether different from mere prompting, or training, or culture. Ruinous as the Fall has been to the intellectual and moral constitution of man, it is not alleged that any original faculty has been absolutely struck out or obliterated. But all the faculties have

been debased, corrupted, and perverted; while the affections and the will more especially, have been miserably alienated from, and set in opposition to God. Even in this view of the matter, man, since the calamity of the original apostacy, is no longer, in his whole nature, what he was before. Any change, therefore, which is such as to lift him from his degradation, and give to his mind a decided and constitutional tendency to those duties, pursuits, and enjoyments which were originally delightful,—a change which is such as, in particular, to reinstate his all-gracious and adorable Creator in the dominion of his affections—may well be denominated a new birth, a new creation, a raising from the dead.

It is just such a change which is contemplated, and in some measure described, in the extracts already made, and which is there distinguished by some one or other of these figurative, but appropriate appellations. It is one which has principally to do with “the hidden man of the heart.” Not only is there a new aspect and exhibition of outward conduct,—not only, in the same situation and under the same circumstances in which the individual formerly stood, will his procedure be different,—not only has he been led to adopt new principles,—not only is his life under the constant operation of nobler and purer motives,—not only has he now higher aims, holier employments, more spiritual pleasures, and more heavenly prospects,—but a *new heart and mind* have been put within him. He is conscious that he remains personally the same identical being, without the addition or the extinction of a single faculty; but the *state* of his being has undergone a thorough and radical change. The whole faculties and affections of his soul have been, in a religious point of view, fashioned

again after the image of God, by the special energy of the Holy Spirit.

The passages which relate to this momentous change, undoubtedly intimate, when fairly interpreted, that it consists not merely in that improvement of our powers, our sentiments, our dispositions, and our habits, which is the result of cultivation and discipline, but in *a constitutional renovation of the soul itself*,—of which that improvement is the natural consequence. It is expressly spoken of as that which no merely moral means, and no merely human powers can effect,—as that which extends to, and which obviates and removes the original and innate corruption of our nature itself in its fallen state. It is the result of an immediate application of no less a power than that by which the Lord Jesus Christ was raised from the dead. The human mind is prone to evil, and of this proneness evil habits and sinful conduct are the consequence, and not the essence or the cause. Reason, and conscience, under its direction, may impose some restraints and produce some improvements on these habits, but they cannot renew the degenerate heart. These faculties themselves, and the individuals by whom they are employed or appealed to, are represented, in Scripture, as standing in need of such a renovation as it is the exclusive prerogative of God the Holy Ghost to accomplish. Nay, as a demonstrative proof that this change has to do, not merely with the sentiments and habits of the soul, but with its inherent tendencies and its very nature, we have only to reflect that it is absolutely indispensable to the salvation of *infants*, because, though they have done neither good nor evil, they are born in sin, and are, by original corruption, contrary to the law, and unfit for entering the presence of God. They are “born

of the flesh ;" and "that which is born of the flesh *is* flesh," that is, in a corrupt and degenerate state. As such, therefore, they are opposite to "that which is born of the Spirit," or, in other words, to that which alone can enter into or inherit the kingdom of God.

Previously to regeneration, all the individuals of the human race are equally unregenerate, although some are much more depraved in their habits and flagrant in their sins than others. In like manner, all who have been regenerated are equally regenerate, although the regeneration of some may have taken place at a much earlier period, and after a much shorter preparatory process than that of others, and although some may have, through the continued influences of the Spirit, attained to much higher degrees of holiness than others have attained. In the case of those who have grown up to the exercise of their rational and moral faculties, regeneration is a change the effects of which these faculties must, of course, be understood to experience ; but since that change may be produced on others who are in the very first stage of life, while the faculties and dispositions of their souls are not yet so developed as to be directly operated on,—it is evident that the soul itself is, in every case of regeneration, the immediate subject of the Spirit's regenerating energy. Wherever this has been exerted, a corresponding change on the understanding, the affections, the conscience, and the will, must be the certain, and, in many instances, the immediate consequence. The great leading fact, however, which it has been our first concern to establish and illustrate, is simply this, that Regeneration, strictly and properly speaking, consists in a new birth of the soul itself, which is renewed by the Eternal Spirit, in the holy and blessed image of Him who created it. In the feli-

citous and energetic language of a celebrated writer, "It is the creating of a new heart, which collects the energies of a man's whole being in the focus of the conscience."

CHAPTER II.

THE NECESSITY OF REGENERATION.

“EXCEPT a man be born again—born of the Spirit—he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” In these words, our Lord not only expresses, in the most unqualified manner, the absolute necessity of regeneration, but also informs us that this necessity arises from the impossibility of the natural man’s being a subject of God’s spiritual and eternal kingdom. The moment that our common ancestor became guilty of transgression, or a partaker of sin, he lost the image of God, being no longer like Him “in knowledge,” “righteousness, and true holiness.” Having lost all these features of the Divine character, he, at the same time, forfeited the favour, approbation, and fellowship of his Creator—privileges which, till then, had constituted the highest honour and chief happiness of his existence. Nor was this all; for he came instantly under His wrath and curse, including all the miseries which these involved, “both in this life, and that which is to come.” The guilty and degraded condition to which Adam was thus reduced by sin, is that which is inherited by all his ordinary posterity. In such a condition, they might become the objects of God’s sovereign mercy, but never, while their hearts remained unchanged, could they become the objects of his approving love. Out of that

state, it was impossible, in the nature of things, either that they should deliver themselves, or that, through unfeigned attachment to the holiness which they had lost, they should seriously desire themselves to be delivered. In this way, there was no prospect but that the banishment which they had incurred from the presence of Him with whom evil cannot dwell was to be perpetual. So long as sin remained not only unsubdued but reigning within them, it was not to be imagined, without a new insult to a Being of infinite holiness, that man could be restored to the position which he had originally occupied. His expulsion from the Divine presence and communion was, no doubt, inflicted as a part of his punishment, but it amounted not to any atonement for his guilt, and had not in itself any tendency to overcome his ungodliness, or reclaim his affections. Nay, one of the just, inevitable, and most appalling consequences of his expulsion was, that his estrangement from God would become farther and farther increased. The loss of the Divine favour, and the hopelessness of regaining it, were certain to damp and paralyze his efforts, even if he had felt any real desire after holiness. Melancholy experience has accordingly shown that mankind, as condemned and exiled on account of their apostacy, have "not retained God in their knowledge," that "their foolish heart has been darkened," and that they have been "filled with all unrighteousness."

In order to perceive more clearly the necessity of being born again, it must be remembered that, ever since the Fall, mankind have not only been living in actual and habitual sin, but that the thoughts, desires, and purposes of their hearts are averse to that which is good, and prone to that which even they themselves feel

to be evil. In their natural state, neither their regard to the dictates of their own consciences, nor their convictions as to the express enactments embodied in the record of God's law, are sufficient to restrain them from the commission of sin,—from giving way to temptation, or indulging in forbidden and unhallowed enjoyments. This unquestionable and mournful fact is not to be explained merely by referring it to a neglected education, aided by the influence of bad example or abounding iniquity. These circumstances have, no doubt, all of them their effects. We have sufficiently frequent occasion to observe what takes place when extreme ignorance and abject poverty are combined,—when the outcasts of society have to support a precarious existence, reckless alike of the pity, the esteem, or the execration of those around them. But while it is thus demonstrated that certain unsightly and noxious weeds abound most and thrive best on a neglected soil, the observation does not account either for the origin of the one, or the deterioration of the other. The soil was not always in the state in which such weeds would be attracted to it, as that which was most genial to their nature,—that in which they were the most quickly to take root, and the most widely to spread.

It is the estrangement of the human heart from God, and not the fruits and manifestations of this, to which especially He demands our attention. Is it not an instructive and humiliating fact, that as man is now born into the world, he needs no training or prompting to bring him into familiarity with sin; and that all the training and influence that can be thought of or employed to preserve him from its commission or indulgence, in some one or other of its forms, are inadequate to the attainment of this momentous object? This was

not the state of things when God made man at first, in his own holy image, and when, looking on his workmanship, He said, with special reference to man's moral nature, "Behold it is very good." In man as he now exists, we are called on to contemplate the estrangement and enmity of a heart which was once in the fullest unison with the mind of Him who formed it,—of a heart whose warmest feelings and noblest energies were once continually called forth in the service of Him whose love was its choicest and richest recompence,—of a heart whose languishings were once only after a more enlarged capacity of glorifying Him whom it was the chief end of man's creation to glorify and to enjoy. Melancholy and grievous, indeed, must have been the change which our constitution has undergone, ere a heart once so truly partaking in the moral nature of God, could be degraded to a state in which it was content to be without the communications of his approving voice; in which it could regard Him only with aversion and dread; and in which the pleasures that it was most eager to obtain and best fitted to relish, were such as had least in common with the attributes of a spiritual existence.

The hearts of all who continue in this degraded state, entertain toward God the feelings implied in the language ascribed to them when represented as saying, "Depart from us: for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit should we have, if we pray unto him?" Even those whose consciences have been so far impressed that they will not allow them to be at ease without the form, at least, of praying to Him, are capable of furnishing abundant evidence that the service and worship which He requires, are much more spiritual and

pure than anything which proceeds out of the heart of man as now constituted. They are satisfied although they give Him nothing better, perhaps, than the spare fragments of their time, the lifeless exercise of wearied faculties and exhausted spirits, and the impious mockery of unsettled and unsanctified thoughts. And let us observe how little concern they seem to take in the condition and prospects of their own souls. Those souls were, by their Creator, destined for immortality, and are certain of being hereafter for ever happy, or for ever miserable. And such is the anxiety, so to speak, which He has shown to rescue them from the misery and ruin into which sin has already plunged them, that "He spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all." For this end, "it pleased Jehovah to bruise him; he hath put him to grief:" to "make his soul an offering for sin." To demonstrate, moreover, the sufficiency and acceptance of that offering, He raised him from the dead, received him up into glory, and ordained that he should appear at his own right hand, to make continual intercession on behalf of all whom he died to redeem. Yet, with the knowledge and admission of these facts—facts so illustrative of the inestimable value attached to the souls of men, such is their degraded and deadened condition as fallen creatures, that these souls themselves occupy much less of their thoughts than is devoted to the care of the body, the gratifications of sense, or the pursuits of worldly business. But again: God had originally written on the heart of man the substance of that law which was fitted to be a perfect rule of duty, because a faithful transcript of the Divine will—that law which has ever regulated the conduct of angels around the throne, and which embodies the eternal principles by which the proceedings of infinite rectitude

itself are regulated; and yet, such are the infatuation and depravity chargeable on our race, that that law, instead of being loved, honoured, and obeyed, is disliked, evaded, insulted, and habitually broken.

Now, when an accusing spirit, as it were, has risen up in the word of God, and has preferred and established such charges as these against the degenerate children of men, can it be supposed that they are in such a condition as to be honoured by admission into his special presence? “What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial?” Between beings so opposite, in moral character, as the adorable Creator and those his creatures who have lost his image, there cannot possibly be any interchange of affection. That opposition must be done away—their respective characters must, by some means, approximate—before the intercourse which once existed can be restored. But what are these means? or what is to be the nature of the approximation? Is the Divine character to be lowered, and brought to the level of sinful man, or, at least, to such a level as he may be supposed, by strenuous and persevering efforts, to attain! No: that character could not be what it is, if it were susceptible of change. The change must be altogether on the other side; and it must be such a change as conveys to man that newness of heart and life which fits him for delighting in the law of the Lord. It must be such as to render him what he was at the beginning, an object worthy of the Divine approbation and complacency. An enemy to God in his mind by wicked works, he must have his enmity abolished. He must be taught practically to “consent unto the law, that it is

good." He must be brought to "delight in the law of God after the inward man."

All this, then, or, in other words, regeneration of heart, is absolutely indispensable to the restoration of sweet and holy fellowship between the immutable and immaculate God, and any one of his polluted and rebellious creatures. The indispensableness of this great moral change, before any man can enter into the kingdom of God, may be illustrated by reference, first—to his kingdom—his spiritual kingdom on earth; and, secondly—to his kingdom of glory in heaven.

I. *The spiritual kingdom of God on earth.*

The church or kingdom of God on earth is to be regarded as a spiritual community. Many, indeed, are visibly connected with it who are not really spiritual in character. Without adverting, however, to this distinction, and on the supposition that they are what they profess to be, they are, in Scripture, spoken of under the general designation of "saints." They are denominated *spiritual*. Their privileges, their worship, and their character are all contemplated as being of this description. Hence the language of the Apostle to the brethren at Rome, "beloved of God, called to be saints." Instead of attaching undue importance to those rites and observances which were no longer binding, he reminds them that "the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." These are the graces which are required and expected in the genuine members of his kingdom, and which it is calculated to exercise, to foster, and to mature. A spiritual change is requisite or implied in the case of every one who, not in name only, but in reality, enters into that kingdom.

According to the delineations of Scripture, the king-

dom of grace is one which is viewed as conquered from, and erected in the midst of, the kingdom of darkness,—the extent and power of which it is destined to diminish. The two are directly opposed to each other, in character and interests ; and the subjects of each are distinguished by a similar opposition. Deniedness, unconformity, and superiority to the world, are circumstances on which our Lord and his Apostles particularly insist, as characterizing the subjects of the Prince of Peace. Such is the devotedness to him which they are bound to feel, that they must be ready, when he calls on them, for his sake to part with possessions, and friends, and family, and liberty, and even life itself. The kingdom to which they specially belong holds not, and does not admit of their holding, any communication with the unfruitful works of darkness. They are required to have the same “mind in them which was in Christ Jesus.” They are to imbibe the spirit and imitate the life of Him who was “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners.” They are to be not only inoffensive, but beneficent ; not only kind, but forgiving. They are to be “merciful as their Father in heaven is merciful.” As “the children of the Highest,” they are, like Him, to be “kind unto the unthankful and the evil.” To one another they are to exercise the pure and exalted affection of brotherly love. Of this love, that which the Divine Master manifested to his disciples is to be both the pattern and the principle,—the model and the motive. It is by imitating his example in thus loving one another, that they will be held to afford the most gratifying demonstration of love to Himself,—that grand and animating principle by which they ought to be influenced in the discharge of every duty, and taught to submit to any affliction. The Sovereign of the kingdom to which they are under-

stood to belong is One who reigns over it in love, and love is the bond by which its affiliated subjects are held in the most blessed union with Him and with one another. But while they thus "walk in love," they also "walk by faith." These are inseparable graces—the companions and helpers of each other. Faith contemplates the portrait which inspiration has furnished of the life, death, and character of Him "whom having not seen, we love." It recalls and delights to dwell on his promises. It beholds Christ in God, and God in Christ. It hears and sees the great Intercessor within the veil. It confidently anticipates his final return,—“looking for the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.” Faith is thus occupied in contemplating, and then in presenting for the contemplation of love, those things connected with the person, work, and promises of Christ which are best fitted, and specially intended, “to fill” the soul “with all joy and peace in believing.”

But we may further judge what manner of persons the genuine members of the Gospel kingdom are understood to be, by attending to the precepts which are addressed to them, and the motives held forth to influence them in fulfilling them. Every subject of this kingdom, “every one that nameth the name of Christ,” is exhorted and required to “depart from iniquity.” The Gospel of “the grace of God that bringeth salvation,” is the great charter of that kingdom, which indeed, is called by its name. Now, it teaches us that all who belong to it are required to deny themselves to “ungodliness and worldly lusts,” and to “live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world ;” and the great animating motive brought to bear on them with a view to this momentous object, is the consideration of the

one great end for which, so far as sinners are concerned, the Saviour died—namely, “that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.” We are elsewhere reminded that, as the subjects of that kingdom, our life or “conversation must be in heaven,” or, again, “as it becometh the Gospel,”—to whose teaching special reference has just been made. We are solemnly admonished to look for support and consolation in affliction by looking “not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen,”—by habitually realizing and, as it were, “tasting the powers of the world to come,”—by having, through faith, habitual “respect,” like Moses, “unto the recompence of the reward.”

In order, however, to perceive more distinctly the necessity of being born again, before any man can enter into the spiritual kingdom of which we are now speaking, it may be proper to advert more particularly to the terms in which it is characterized, as they occur in a passage already quoted.

1. The first feature of that kingdom there delineated is *righteousness*. He who has founded it, and who reigns over it, is styled “the Lord our Righteousness,”—“the Holy One and the Just.” The glorious testimony of the Father to him is embodied in these remarkable words: ‘Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom: Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity.’ Those, too, over whom he reigns—those who compose this kingdom, are accounted righteous. They are “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people.” But where is the righteousness of those who are still in the state in which they were born? They are still in their sins,—“dead in trespasses and sins.”

“There is not a just man upon earth that doeth good, and sinneth not.” “There is none righteous, no, not one.” “The Scripture hath concluded all under sin,”—shut up the whole world under a sentence of condemnation. Provision, it is true, is made for the admission of sinners of all classes and conditions—of sinners the most heinous and hopeless,—into the kingdom of God; and for thus making them “fellow-citizens of the saints, and of the household of God.” This was one of the grand objects which the Son of God had in view, in coming into the world. He “suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.” “He who knew no sin, was made to be sin for us; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” But, then, it is to be observed that the way in which sinners are admitted into real spiritual union with the kingdom of grace, is just by undergoing the blessed change which makes them new creatures.

2. Another characteristic feature of the kingdom of grace—and another precious privilege of its genuine members—is *peace*. This is a possession of which man, in his natural state, is obviously destitute. A sinner, unconverted, is an enemy to God, or, in other words, not at peace with Him. “There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.” In this condition, man can enjoy no real peace with himself. A guilty conscience will not suffer him to be at rest; or the quiet which is derived from its silence is only the stronger and more melancholy proof of its searedness. It is the quiet of the wilderness, when the wild beasts are crouching in its thickets—the gloomy silence of the air, before the gathering electricity is ready to burst, and convulse it with thunder—the stillness of the mountain, when the raging volcano is hushed, for a season, in the depth of

its caverns! And can any man who is not at peace either with God or himself—who has not the peace of God ruling in his heart,—be supposed to care much for, or contribute much to the peace of others? “Blessed are the peace-makers: for they shall be called the children of God.” But this title will ill apply to those to whom the Apostle says, “From whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?” In their unregenerate state, men can neither possess nor rightly appreciate that “peace which passeth all understanding.” It is only on “being justified by faith that we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ.” “He is our peace,” and it is “through the blood of his cross” that we are “reconciled to God.” But this faith is one of the graces of which we are made partakers only in being born again. It is, in short, by one and the same blessed change that the sinner becomes a child of God, a partaker of genuine faith, and a spiritual member of his heavenly kingdom.

3. But a third feature is mentioned as characteristic of this kingdom—the kingdom of grace—namely, *joy in the Holy Ghost*. All who enter into, or belong to this kingdom, are made partakers of some measure of this joy. And can any have possession of this joy who are living after, or minding the things of the flesh—nay, perhaps, “grieving,” “resisting,” and “doing despite unto the Spirit of grace?” “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” Such being the case, it is plain that he can have no pleasure in them, and, consequently, no joy in the Holy Ghost. He can have no pleasure in the word of God as such—in the denunciations of sin which the Spirit has there delivered, or in

the invitations which have there been addressed to sinners to come to the Saviour, and, in so doing, to renounce and forsake their sins. He can have no pleasure in the earnest and serious observance of those holy ordinances, public or private, which Divine Wisdom has instituted, not more with a view to the promotion of the glory of God than with a view to the spiritual improvement and welfare of his worshippers. The man who has no pleasure in these things cannot be expected to seek or relish the society of those persons to whom they are a daily and indispensable delight, and whose hearts are so full of them that, out of that fulness, they will necessarily and frequently be speaking. The man who lives without prayer, or with whom, at best, it is but a constrained, irregular, and lifeless exercise, can have no desire for religious intercourse with those who, like Zacharias, are found "walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord," or who, like Cornelius the devout centurion, "pray to God always." And what fellowship can a prayerless man enjoy with Him who is the "Spirit of grace and of supplications?"—that Spirit who, in the souls of the people of God, "maketh intercession for them"—and with them for God—"with groanings which cannot be uttered." We have only to reflect on what has just been stated, in order to perceive that we have here another, and very obvious, reason for the conviction that no man who is without joy in the Holy Ghost can, as yet, be regarded as belonging to the spiritual kingdom of God.

II. But the same thing is, at least, as certain in regard to *the kingdom of God in heaven*. It is to the kingdom of God on earth that our Lord, in the passage before us, may be thought more immediately to refer; but his statement holds, with equal or greater force,

when applied to the other. It is for those only who have undergone the great change of being born again, that this latter kingdom is prepared; and none but they can be permitted to enter it. It may justly be called "the inheritance of the saints in light." The holiness and spirituality which are attainable in the kingdom of grace, are, even in their highest degrees, inferior to the holiness and spirituality which pertain to "the spirits of just men made perfect." It is assuredly with reference to the state in which these spirits exist, that we must understand the solemn declaration in which "holiness" is spoken of as that "without which no man shall see the Lord." "Into the great city"—the Jerusalem which is above—"there shall in nowise enter anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie; but they who are written in the Lamb's book of life." The fellowship which the citizens there enjoy with Him, who is the glory in the midst of it, is of a much more intimate and blessed nature than that which they could expect, or even imagine, while they sojourned in this lower world. Here they could "see" only as "through a glass, darkly;" but there they "see face to face." They are represented as not only seeing the Lord, and being satisfied with his likeness, but as being "like him," and being "for ever with him." It was the prospect and assurance of all this that Jesus, in the immediate contemplation of his death and removal, employed to comfort and encourage his anxious and sorrowing disciples. But the higher and holier the fellowship and employments of the kingdom of glory, the more urgent and obvious the necessity of being born again, in order to our being prepared for entering it.

When we think of what the Scriptures have revealed

as to the society, occupations, and felicities of the heavenly state—of our there having communion, not only with sinless angels and glorified spirits, but with “Jesus, the Mediator of the New Covenant, and with God the Father of all”—we are struck with the ineffable importance of what yet remains to be accomplished, in regard to the sanctification even of those who are already, as the regenerate children of God, unquestionably admitted into the kingdom of grace. In the dying and recorded experiences of many most eminent saints—in the very devotions which have immediately preceded the dissolution of their earthly tabernacle—traces of earthliness and evidences of imperfection have forced themselves on our attention. The damps and dews of a cloudy atmosphere, by which the believer continued to be surrounded, have seemed to chill and repress the wings of faith, even when it might have been expected, at such a moment, to feel and manifest peculiar buoyancy, as just about to shoot away into the upper regions of everlasting sunshine! “The blessed and only Potentate” is described as “dwelling in light unapproachable.” In the sublimest strain of adoration, the Psalmist says to him, “Thou art clothed with honour and majesty: who coverest thyself with light as with a garment.” And it is said of Him in the book of Job, “Behold, he putteth no trust in his saints; yea, the heavens are not clean in his sight.” The very thought of entering the unsearchable, but all-searching light of such a presence, may well fill the soul, even of the regenerate, with a holy awe. And if so, “Where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?” Let us imagine an unregenerate sinner brought to the gates of eternity. Let us think of him as inherently corrupt and practically unrighteous; and, if we may not judge from his

own frightful apprehensions, or from his not less frightful insensibility, in the prospect of dissolution, let us judge from the awful utterance which the Divine oracles have given, whether it be possible for him to enter into the "rest which remaineth for the people of God."

On the supposition that a sinner is about to die, *just as he lived*, and that his soul, at the moment of its separation from the body, is the same, in all its downward and debasing tendencies that it has always been, what can, on Scripture grounds, be anticipated, but that he shall "be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power?" Can a being whose heart was, from the first, estranged from his Creator, and whose estrangement, instead of being done away or diminished, has been greatly increased by the multiplied acts of enmity and disobedience to which it has led—be supposed to enter into all the sympathies, employments, and delights of glorified spirits? The first moment of his appearing before God shall do away his unbelief, indeed, but not the evil heart from which it proceeded. Belief shall be forced upon him; but, as it can then have nothing to embrace but such truths as make the devils tremble, he shall have his portion with hypocrites and unbelievers. Such a sinner leaves behind him in dying, as truly as does the regenerate child of God, his polluted and corruptible body; but his soul, though thus released from some of the temptations of which the body was the inlet and the instrument, retains all the properties of that guiltiness in the prosecution and indulgence of which it had, for a lifetime, employed it. He never loved, and never felt any aptness to love God, even when the blandishments and benignities of Divine love were exhibited to him in the Gospel; and how can he be

thought to love Him when, especially after his slighting and rejecting these, God is presented to him, in "terrible majesty," as the righteous Sovereign who, to such transgressors of his law and despisers of his grace, "is a consuming fire?"

To such a person as we are now considering, the worship of God has uniformly been a burden, his Sabbath a weariness, and his sanctuary a place of listless indifference or irksome constraint. He may have sometimes—perhaps frequently—offered up the language of prayer and the accents of praise, but he never sought God with all his heart, and therefore never tasted the delights of spiritual communion. He could, at times, profane the name of God without hesitation; and he could entice the souls, and imperil the salvation of others, without reluctance or remorse. Can such a man as this become, while still unchanged in heart, an indweller in God's Temple in the heavens? a companion of those pure and those purified spirits who serve Him there, day and night, with rapturous thanksgiving and rejoicing? The thing is utterly impossible. Into the kingdom of God in glory he cannot be admitted; and, beyond its boundaries, there is no real happiness to be found for any who enter into world which is unseen. Without being born again, no soul of man can be admitted into that kingdom; and if, for a moment, he *were* admitted, he would feel himself utterly incapable of participating in its happiness. Nowhere in the universe of God could he be placed where all things around him would come into more immediate, fierce, painful, and ceaseless conflict with the whole texture and susceptibilities of his being. The wrath of God would be felt to flame against him, even in the mansions of celestial and ineffable glory, in a way more terrific and

nsupportable than though he were consigned, at once, to the appropriate place of torment to the guilty and impenitent, in the regions of blasphemy, darkness, and despair.

The considerations which have now been submitted should be sufficient to demonstrate the absolute necessity of a change of heart, in order to our being members or heirs of the kingdom of God. There are many persons, however, who, without denying this, appear to have but slight impressions of this necessity, so far as concerns themselves. The difficulty, indeed, of engaging the serious attention of mankind to the guilt and danger of their natural state, so long as they continue in it, and to the unparalleled importance of their being delivered out of it—is such as can arise only from the spiritual depravity and insensibility which it implies. A feeling of deep and personal interest as to the regeneration of the soul cannot really be experienced, till the soul is becoming—if it has not already become—the subject of the change in question. Such a feeling, at all events, is one of the most promising, if not decisive, symptoms by which the change can be indicated.

It is this *personal solicitude*, then, dear fellow-sinners, which it is of far greater consequence to produce in you than any speculative conviction, however strong, respecting the absolute necessity of being renewed in the spirit of your minds. The production of this solicitude, while it ought ever to call forth the most strenuous, prayerful, and persevering efforts of every one who is honoured to be intrusted with “the ministry of reconciliation,” cannot actually be accomplished but by the special and quickening influences of the Spirit of God. This Divine Teacher and Agent, and He only—as we shall have

more particularly to show in the next chapter—can give full and saving effect to the representations which are made to you, on this most deeply momentous subject. On this very account, however, we should be all the more earnest, importunate and indefatigable in employing every scriptural means of appealing to the understanding and the conscience, and, at the same time, of reaching the heart. The hope, resting on the promise, of the Spirit's blessed aid, joined to an ever present and ever deepening sense of the guilt and misery of every sinner in his unregenerate state, must stir us up and sustain us, in exhorting and beseeching all to whom we have access, to give diligent heed to "the things which belong to their peace."

Let us entreat you, then, to think, not only of the corruption of human nature, as it is delineated in the Scriptures of truth, but also how deeply each of you is involved in that lamentable corruption. Think of the thousand secret faults and presumptuous sins which have sprung from this, and which have justly subjected you to God's awful displeasure. Consider, with the profoundest attention and reverence, the terribly sublime exhibition which these same Scriptures have given of the unsullied and unapproachable holiness of that Invisible and Eternal King whose subjects you are, whose eye rests on you every moment, and whose mandate shall, in a short time, bring you into judgment! And, while you thus contemplate his holiness, think with equal solemnity on his mercy. That mercy which is so fully unfolded in the plan of redemption, is itself one of the most striking evidences of the guilt and misery of man,—saving for which, it would not have been needed; although, however greatly needed, it never could have been deserved, and might never have been exercised or

even revealed. Will you seriously reflect that you are "by nature the children of wrath, even as others;" and that to be under the wrath of that Creator whose you are, and who has the absolute disposal of all that can befall you, is to be in immediate jeopardy of everlasting perdition? Will you bear in mind, that even to continue in the sinful state in which you were born,—not to speak of the hardening of the heart through the deceitfulness of sin,—is just to have entailed on you that heritage of unspeakable woe, which is prepared for the devil and his angels! Will you let it sink into your hearts, that it is only in God's favour that there is life; that it is only in his gracious presence that there is fullness of joy; and that this joy you shall never be permitted to taste, without being first made "partakers of his holiness?" Will you seek, moreover, to realize the great truth, that none of you can possibly partake of this holiness, while you are disesteeming and rejecting the overtures of his mercy and love?

O be persuaded, dear fellow-sinners, to look, in *your own case*, at the necessity of becoming the children of God, that you may enter into the privileges of his kingdom. But it is not at this necessity, as a detached fact, that we entreat you, in Christ's name, to look. He does not wish you to be impressed, how deeply soever, with the solemn truth, that, while you remain in your natural state, you are under his wrath, and liable to perish,—only for the purpose of leaving you for ever under the horrors of such an impression. He wishes you to feel, indeed, that you are "dead in trespasses and sins;" but it is only that this feeling may be employed to make you seek those blessed influences of his Spirit which are provided and proffered, that you may be quickened and created unto good works, and may lay hold on eternal

life. It is only proclaiming to you the truth, and therefore only doing that of which you have no right to complain, when He tells you that the state of heart and of life in which you are living, as the descendants of the first transgressor, is a state which, in the life that is to come, must land you in the writhings of agony and the depths of despair.

But although it were no more than you deserved, to have your thoughts thus compelled from time to time to anticipate the punishment that should finally overtake you, it would evidently be of no benefit to you to be merely convinced that such a punishment was absolutely inevitable, and, when it came, would be alike intolerable and endless. The Saviour, however, is pointing out to you, not only the awful and inevitable consequences of sin, if you continue in it, but also how a complete deliverance from them may be obtained. This is the very errand on which He came into the world. It was, as himself proclaims, "to seek and to save that which was lost." He came, not merely to tell sinners that they were sick,—labouring under the malignant, loathsome, and fatal leprosy of sin,—but to heal as many as believed in him of their leprosy. He came, not only to tell them of the hardness and impenitence of their hearts, but "to bind up the broken-hearted." He came, not merely "to hear the groaning of the prisoner,"—to tell him, through the gratings, of the wretchedness and hopelessness of his bondage,—but "to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound." He came, not only to ask of any of those who are deep in debt to God's righteous law, and have nothing to pay, "How much owest thou unto my Lord?" but to say to every one who welcomes the offered boon,—All is freely forgiven thee, for I have paid it all. He

came, not merely to tell the sinner that his house is in flames, and urge him to flee for his life, but to point him to a place of safety,—nay, while he lingers, to lay his hand upon him, and bring him forth. He not only sees the little ship “in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves,” and ready to sink with all on board, but He walks toward it on the waters, and the moment that He is received into the ship, the tempest ceases, and the perishing are in safety. He came, not merely to inform of their hopeless state those who were ready to die, but to arrest the hand of death,—nay, even to raise the dead to life again. He came, in short, to give himself for the life of the world. He “poured out his soul unto death,” and in the last issues of his living heart, sent a flood of life and health to the soul of every dying believer. While the Teacher sent from God is assuring you that, except ye be born again, ye cannot enter into the kingdom of God, He is at the same time assuring you that that blessed change is one which the Holy Spirit is abundantly able, at any time, and in the case of any sinner, to accomplish. O that that Divine Agent may make you individually feel the momentousness and necessity of the change on which you have now been so largely addressed. May you feel what it is, in thus passing from death unto life, both “to flee from the wrath to come,” and to flee “for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.”

CHAPTER III.

THE AGENT OR AUTHOR OF REGENERATION.

IN the inquiry which, in a previous chapter, has been instituted into the Nature of Regeneration, we were desirous to distinguish the change itself from all its mere accessories. Setting aside, in the meantime, its antecedents, accompaniments, and consequences, except in so far as they illustrated its proper and peculiar nature, we attempted to show, from the word of God, that Regeneration consists simply in a new birth of the soul itself. By the Eternal Spirit, the soul is renewed in the holy and blessed image of Him who created it. This, we are satisfied, is the only true meaning of all such terms and phrases in Scripture as “born again”—“born of the Spirit”—“born of God”—“a new creature”—“the new man”—“quickened together with Christ”—“passed from death unto life”—“dead unto sin, but alive unto God.” It will be perceived that this view of the matter cuts off, at once, as idle and presumptuous, all discussion respecting the *means* or the *process* of regeneration ; and respecting the way in which Divine grace *operates* to the renewing of the sinner’s mind. The change referred to in these expressions is one of which the soul itself—not in its substance or essence indeed, but in its spiritual state and tendencies—is the immediate subject ; and one in which—though not overborne in any way contrary to its own nature

or volitions as a responsible agent—it is really as entirely in the hands, and at the disposal, of the Author of its being as when it was originally created.

We do not insinuate that the soul, while under the regenerating influence of the Holy Spirit, is in *no* respect active, but merely that none of its activity has any direct and positive share in *its own regeneration*. In becoming a new creature, it becomes, of course, the workmanship exclusively of Him who thus creates it. Attaching to the term *regeneration* the well-defined meaning which the language of Scripture so evidently requires, we must at once perceive, that the Divine grace exerted in this change does not operate in the manner of mere moral suasion,—that is, in the way in which arguments and reasons operate on a mind, judging and deciding for itself. It were certainly absurd to talk of *persuading* the soul to be begotten again, or created again, and still more so, to talk of its begetting or creating itself. Nay, it were absurd to talk of persuading the soul, while in its natural state, to “delight itself in the Lord,” or to “delight in the law of God.” The law never speaks of it in that state, but to charge it with guilt, and, by its threatenings, to fill it with remorse, resentment, or alarm. Before the soul can be persuaded to take delight either in God or in his law, it must be possessed of new moral perceptions, tastes, and desires. In other words, it must, by a power not its own, have been *already renewed*.

Let it not be supposed, however, that, previously to regeneration, the Spirit never addresses himself to, or makes use of, the faculties and affections of the mind, as they then exist. It is just to these that so great a part of the word which He has dictated is directed. He speaks to the soul by means of its natural convictions,

hopes, and fears. He leads it by its own reason and conscience, exercised and operated on by the light of his word, to admit the justice of the Divine law. He thus convinces it of sin,—He thus awakens it to a sense of its danger,—and He thus causes it, in anguish, helplessness, and apprehension, to look around for relief. He has, in short, many dealings with a sinner before regeneration, as well as after it,—dealings, in which he addresses the soul as a subject of moral discipline, and such a subject as He finds it at the moment. Even in its natural state, he may engage and exercise its powers in many things which are of the highest importance to its future progress and its peace. But all these things are essentially distinct from regeneration,—just as distinct as are the workings, and watchings, and spiritual advances of the soul, long after it has been begotten again in the image of God. These things are as distinct from the glorious change itself as the varying forms, and the rosy or gilded hues of the floating clouds around him are distinct from the rising sun. There may be many deep convictions of guilt, many fearful anticipations of a judgment to come, and many agonizing sensations under the kindling of God's hot displeasure, without regeneration actually taking place, and, in some instances, without any special interference of the Spirit at all. And, on the other hand, regeneration may be effected—as in the case of infants—where no such convictions can be attained or produced, and no such fears or feelings can either operate or exist.

If we reflect, then, that the soul may have something to do in what takes place within it, both before regeneration and after it, but that regeneration itself is entirely the work of the Eternal Spirit, we shall perceive how irrelevant, if not irreverent it is, to

descant on the manner and means of this change. If it may be asked in what manner, by what process, and by what means, does the Spirit of God regenerate the soul, or renew it after his image, why may it not, in like manner, be asked in what manner, by what process, and by what means, did the Author of its being fashion it in that image at first? May it not be asked how He still brings a soul into existence, to animate a body along with which it partakes of hereditary and inherent corruption? The inquiry as to the means, is met by an immediate reference to the omnipotent energy of the Godhead. The inquiry as to the manner, is answered by a question of his own, "Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?" The fact, the evidence, and the effects of the change are all that He will exhibit to us in this matter. All that He will say is comprehended in our Lord's words to Nicodemus, "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit."

The reason why we have been accustomed to speak and hear about the means and the manner of a person's being born again, is our confounding or identifying this change with the other effects which result from the influences and operations of the Spirit on the soul, in his general work of *effectual calling*; or, in other words, our confounding regeneration with the whole series of mental changes which result in what is justly and scripturally expressed by the general term *conversion*. It is all right to speak of the manner and the means by which a sinner is brought to perceive that he is under the condemnation and curse of the Divine law, and that his condemnation is unquestionably just. It is all right

to speak of the means by which the Spirit awakens a sinner's guilty fears and distracting anxieties—by which He sets his past iniquities in array against him, and makes each of them cast a deep and gloomy shadow of horror and foreboding over the wide and boundless region of his future existence. It is all right to speak of the means by which He makes him feel, even in his inmost soul, that the wages of sin is death; and that all the stir, intoxication, and recklessness of this world and its pleasures, can neither afford him refuge and peace nor yet delay, and far less turn aside “the wrath of God which cometh on the children of disobedience.” It may also be all right to speak of the means by which the Spirit enlightens the mind of a sinner “in the knowledge of Christ,”—in the knowledge of the nature, the provisions, and the terms of that salvation which Christ has to bestow. “By the law is the knowledge of sin;” and the Spirit, by unfolding it in its truth and its terrors, leads to the deep and agitating convictions of the sinner's soul. “The word of God, which is the sword of the Spirit,” though not the only, is an invariable, and by far the most powerful, instrument that He employs in enlightening, convicting, awakening, and reproving the guilty, as well as in edifying, confirming, and advancing those who have already undergone a positive and saving change of heart. “Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth.” “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.” (James i. 18; 1 Pet. i. 23.)

Besides the word of God, read or preached, the Spirit, as He sees meet, makes use of the various circumstances and events which occur in the history of individuals and of families. Ordinary or peculiar afflictions, pain-

ful bereavements, great and sudden reverses, imminent dangers, or overwhelming difficulties, may all be brought to bear on the minds of those with whom He is at work. Or, He may make use, on the other hand, of things the very opposite, such as signal deliverances, unlooked-for acquisitions, recovered blessings, relieved anxieties, or accomplished hopes. These things will operate differently on different minds; and, in the providence of God, they will be specially adjusted to the purposes of his Spirit. He knows thoroughly the recent history and the present state of every soul. He knows the thoughts which are filling it at the moment, as well as the projects which it has been revolving, and the compunctions with which it has been visited. He knows how to reach the understanding, to alarm the conscience, to impress the imagination, and to touch the heart,—how to subdue it by terror, or to melt it by love. He knows how to deal with the reckless and the cautious; with the sanguine and the melancholy; with the fearless and the timid. He knows how those who are naturally generous are wounded by desertion or ingratitude,—how the covetous feel when their treasures perish or are swept away,—how the vain-glorious are mortified by neglect or indifference instead of applause. In a thousand ways He orders it so that men's "sins shall find them out." He "makes their iniquities to correct, and their backslidings to reprove them." He shuts them up to a sense of sin, and under a sentence of condemnation; and then are they the better able to see their need, as they should be the more disposed to accept the offer of a free forgiveness. In this way we may, in many instances, be able to judge, with no small probability, as to the circumstance or circumstances by which the real concern of a sinner as to the state and

interests of his soul has been originally awakened. We may thus fix, in some cases, on the more immediate incident or the precise occasion to which the awakening of his concern is to be referred. But still, we are not, on this account, warranted to say that we have ascertained the moment, or can delineate the manner, in which regeneration itself, as the special and exclusive work of the Spirit, is effected.

And while we may thus understand something as to the means and the mode of the Spirit's dealing with, or operating on a soul, previously to its actual regeneration, so may we understand and speak of the means and the mode of his dealing with it afterwards. He exercises and invigorates the graces which are called forth, or implanted in the soul, at the moment when spiritual life is imparted. By exhibiting to the mind, in a clear and affecting light, the facts and doctrines, the precepts and examples, the promises and threatenings of God's holy word, He may exert on it a most powerful and salutary influence, "working in it both to will and to do." We may understand how a process must be followed, and how means may be used, in diminishing the force of temptation on the mind of the individual, and in withdrawing him from its more frequent and violent assaults, as well as in preparing him to meet, and enabling him to resist and overcome it. All the instrumentality of motives, restraints, and preventives may be kept in constant and gracious operation. Besetting sins may receive a seasonable and effectual check, from the sudden and alarming inroads of sickness, calamity, or disease. The disenthralled affections of the soul may speedily be attracted by the spiritual and heavenly objects which, by the Spirit of all grace, are, for this purpose, exhibited and recommended to its contemplations.

Blending with all its faculties and affections, the principle of grace may be made to operate on them as a purifying leaven ; and then, moreover, it may be kept in livelier and more efficient exercise by the various dispensations of providence, the congenial employments and duties of life, and the immediate suggestions of the very Being by whom this grace was infused. In this part also of the Spirit's work, we see clearly that a process of progressive sanctification is conducted, and that, in conducting it, He employs the instrumentality, and admits the co-operation of the very individuals whose holiness he is perfecting.

Let it be recollected, however, that while the Spirit of God is thus testifying with the spirits of his children, that "He who hath begun a good work in them will perform it until the day of Christ," this very statement implies or embodies a precious testimony that they are already "born again." The process which we have last described, instead of being the process of *regeneration*, evidently presupposes that this has already been accomplished. The spiritual discipline and improvement to which we have been alluding, affords us as little authority as the previous process of which we have spoken, to pronounce either on the precise time, or on the general mode and means of this momentous and, in reality, supernatural change. We may mark, and are bound to study, the symptoms which attend the progress of a sinner's convictions and alarms, and the symptoms also which attend the progress in holiness of a regenerate child of God ; and we may imagine, in the presumption of attempting to account for everything, not only that the progress in the one case resembles the progress in the other, but, moreover, that in an individual's passing

from the former state into the latter, a similar though less protracted operation takes place.

This is just the point of difference. The change which the sinner undergoes in being made a new creature, is essentially different from any of the previous or subsequent advances which he makes, or any of the impulses which he receives. It is the result of the Spirit's direct and exclusive energy acting on the soul. It is an effect which must as thoroughly exclude all co-operation of the creature as the act of creation itself; and an effect which must follow as immediately and instantaneously as when God breathed into man's nostrils the breath of life. Of regeneration, strictly so called, there can be no *degrees*. A man must either be born again or *not* born again. How gradually soever matters have proceeded with him *before* this event, and how gradually soever the effects and evidences may be *evolved and ascertained* by his subsequent life, this gives us no insight into the manner in which the Spirit operates in producing the momentous change itself. It is his own strange work, in which He wills, and it is done,—a *work*, therefore, which, although this name is applied to it, admits not of successive steps, and the manner of accomplishing which admits not of any explanation.

We may say with the greatest truth,—and it is a truth of the greatest importance, both to the trembling sinner and the doubting saint,—that in the more general work of the Spirit, which we denominate *effectual calling*, He proceeds, not only gradually, though not always at the same rate or in the same order, but also in the use of means,—and these, too, as endlessly diversified and variously combined as are the cases and characters of the individuals with whom they are employed.

In saying this, however, we must recollect that, strictly speaking, we do not allude to *regeneration* at all—which, in its very nature, excludes all but the direct agency of the Holy Spirit, and is limited to the moment when that direct and creating energy of his is actually put forth. All men are, by nature, unholy; none of them, without holiness, shall see the Lord; and it is impossible for any of them to be both holy and unholy, in the Scripture sense of these words—that is, both regenerate and unregenerate—at the same instant. An instant there must, therefore, be, in the case of all who shall enter into the kingdom of God, before and up to which, they were unholy in his sight, however deeply they might be convinced of sin; and, of course, an instant there must also be, when their holiness has its beginning, and they are utterly unholy in his sight no more. *That* is the moment of regeneration; and, in the hands of the Omnipotent Spirit, even a *moment* for such a change is enough! It is like the moment in Ezekiel's vision, when the Breath came and breathed upon the slain. There had previously been a noise, and a shaking, and a coming together of the dry bones; and "the sinews and the flesh had come up upon them, and the skin covered them;" but as yet, "there was no breath in them," and the instant that this "came into them, they *lived*, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army."

It need scarcely be observed that the *instantaneousness* of regeneration is repeatedly exemplified, and therefore attested in Scripture. Examples amounting to this we have in the case of the woman of Samaria, and of her fellow-citizens,—in the case of the nobleman at Capernaum,—in the case of the father of the child possessed by the evil spirit, who "cried out, and said with tears;

Lord, I believe ; help thou mine unbelief,”—and—most signal of all—in the case of the penitent malefactor on the cross. The very first discourse which was delivered by an Apostle, after the descent of the Holy Ghost, was, in like manner, followed by the immediate conversion of “three thousand souls.” Sergius Paulus the deputy at Paphos, and the jailor at Philippi, were suddenly brought to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ ; and Saul of Tarsus, afterwards Paul the chiefest of the Apostles, was, even while “breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord,” miraculously, indeed, but still, instantaneously, added to their number.

Now, some may imagine, perhaps, that all these cases are so marvellous and peculiar as not to be legitimate illustrations of the doctrine which has here been asserted. It may be alleged that, as the Apostles, not less than their Master, wrought signs and wonders in connection with the preaching of the Word, those miracles were not more exclusively confined to their ministry than have been the instantaneous conversions which have undoubtedly taken place. But let it be remembered, that even those mighty works were, in many instances, exhibited to individuals who, notwithstanding, and as it were in defiance of them, did *not* turn to the Lord ; that the very Apostle who yielded at last instantaneously to the voice of Him who called to him from on high, had previously resisted several very striking and awakening miracles ; and that, in writing as to the most remarkable conversions that had occurred, he ascribes them not to his preaching or his visible acts, however demonstrative of God’s being with him, but to a Divine operation on the hearts of the converted. He tells the Corinthians that his “speech and preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and

of power : that their faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." He prayed, as he informs the Ephesians, "that they might know what was the exceeding greatness of God's power toward them who believe, according to the working of his mighty power,"—even such as He put forth "when He raised Christ from the dead." To the same effect, the Evangelist John solemnly and pointedly states, as to them who believe, that they "were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." The instantaneousness with which regeneration is effected is not exclusively confined to those cases in which outward mighty works were performed. It might naturally be expected that, in the age in which such works as these were manifested, impressions would be deeper, and effects more speedily produced and brought to light, in regard to the change of heart which sinners had undergone, than in the ages which were to follow. We do not know, however, what wonderful results are yet to illustrate the triumphs of Divine grace in the glory of "the latter days;" and there is just as much evidence and certainty as ever, that those whom the Spirit does regenerate, and who then truly "pass from death unto life," He regenerates in a moment.

At the same time, it does not by any means follow, that all who are regenerated have been sensible of, or must be able to *ascertain*, the moment of their regeneration. That *some* have been sensible of this, there can be no doubt; and others, though not sensible of it at the moment, may have been able to trace their decidedly religious life to some particular occasion, antecedently to which their life had been decidedly the reverse. It may sometimes happen that the great change is produced, without much previous alarming of the conscience. But

the sanctified and the unsanctified portion of an individual's history, are generally brought into such obvious and immediate contrast as to fix and define the termination of the one and the commencement of the other. In the great majority of cases, we admit, the convincing and alarming of the sinner's soul exists for some length of time before its actual regeneration ; and, in these cases, there is such a gradual and apparently incidental alteration of views, sentiments, and feelings, that no one crisis is really distinguishable. It may not, for a considerable period, be fully ascertained that such a change has actually taken place ; and even then, though the *fact* of the change be satisfactorily evinced, there may remain the same ignorance as before with respect to the precise time from which the fact must be dated.

There is another circumstance, too, which must render the fixing of such a date in many, perhaps in most cases, absolutely impossible. We have every reason to believe that a large proportion of the regenerate are regenerated, either in infancy or at so early a stage of life, that, whether it be preceded, or not, by *other* operations of the Spirit, it cannot be either a subject of attention at the time, or of inquiry and remembrance afterwards. When we reflect, indeed, that, if any one has been born again, he must, from the time of his new birth, have been advancing in the spiritual life, or growing, in some measure, in all the graces of his new nature,—and reflect, moreover, that, notwithstanding the various attainments which have marked his progress, he may continue to have no small uncertainty, and no slight misgivings as to his being in a regenerate state,—it is evident that much more uncertainty must exist as to the moment or the occasion when he entered it. If we require evidence of the *fact*, it is absurd to speculate as to the *date* ; and if the evi-

dence of the former is complete, our ignorance of the latter is a matter of little or no significance.

With the mysteriousness of the Spirit's work, we must not allow ourselves to be staggered. When our Lord perceived that Nicodemus was still marvelling at it, and that, in his inability to comprehend *how* it was to be accomplished, he was in danger of not attending sufficiently to what had been solemnly intimated with regard to its necessity, He introduced an argument, derived from analogy, to show him that there are most important, though sometimes familiar, facts which we are utterly unable to explain, and yet which we are constrained to believe. "The wind," said He, "bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." Nicodemus, however, if he did not still doubt the possibility of a man's being born again, continued, at least, to perplex himself as to the *way* in which it was effected. "How," he exclaimed, "can these things be?" His hesitation and perplexity were the more singular and discreditable that, although the great change of which Jesus had been speaking was certainly different from any thing which the Jewish Doctors were accustomed to teach,—it was quite customary for them to apply such language as that Teacher had here used, to the conversion of a proselyte to the religion of Moses.

It was not to this circumstance, however,—not to a conversion merely of this kind,—that our Lord alluded when He replied, as if with equal astonishment, "Art thou a Master"—a principal Teacher—"in Israel, and knowest not these things?" The doctrine which our Lord had stated was no new doctrine. Nicodemus knew, or should have known, that, according to the representations of

the acknowledged Scriptures, all men were so guilty and polluted, in the sight of God, that, without a thorough inward and spiritual change, not one of them could be admitted into his kingdom, or restored to his favour. It had been distinctly stated, for the purpose of meeting and obviating the Ruler's first objection, that the new birth here declared to be necessary, was altogether spiritual in its nature, and exclusively the work of the Spirit. There were well-known passages in those Scriptures which spoke of the "circumcision of the heart,"—of "creating a clean heart and renewing a right spirit" in man,—of God's "putting his law within us,"—of his "taking away the stony heart out of our flesh, and giving us a heart of flesh;" that is, instead of a cold and hard heart, one that is tender, warm, and loving. Now, it was astonishing that Nicodemus should be ignorant of this, or, if not ignorant, that he should not perceive that it amounted just to the doctrine which Jesus had been preaching. The question which Nicodemus put, even after the explanation given to him as to the spiritual nature of the change, showed that, overlooking or not implicitly submitting to what the Scriptures obviously inculcated, he allowed unprofitable questions to occupy his thoughts—allowed the metaphysical difficulties which encompassed the subject, and his own inability to understand how the Spirit operates even the spiritual change here mentioned, to stagger him with respect to its being practicable, even by the Spirit himself. Nay, more: it will be observed that, in allowing his doubts and difficulties thus to affect his views of the power of that Divine agent, he necessarily involved himself in the guilt and inconsistency of limiting or recalling his faith in the testimony of that very person on whom he had waited—specially waited for instruction, and

whom he had, at the very outset, so emphatically acknowledged and proclaimed to be "a Teacher come from God."

This doctrine as to the operation of the Spirit in regenerating the soul, though it may be startling to some, and liable to be abused by others, is in perfect accordance, we are persuaded, both with the Word of God, to which, in stating it, constant reference has been made, and also with the subordinate standards of our Church. It represents the regeneration of the soul, not only as the work of a moment, but as that in the *production* of which the soul itself is entirely passive, and cannot otherwise have any share. "This effectual call," says the Westminster Confession, "is of God's free and special grace alone, not from anything at all foreseen in man; who is altogether passive therein, *until*, being *quickened* and renewed by the Holy Spirit, he is thereby enabled to answer this call, and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed in it."

The precise time or moment of this quickening, can never, except in the rarest instances, be ascertained. Nothing can bring about the vital change till the appointed time when God's free Spirit puts forth his energy for this purpose. But although the unregenerate cannot truly and spiritually seek after holiness, or renewed conformity to the Divine image—yet it does not follow that nothing which, before this, they may desire or attempt, shall be of any future advantage. The hour and instant of passing from death unto life, in the case of all who are born again, is as determinately fixed in the counsels of the Godhead as, in regard to all of us, is the hour of our natural birth, or of our natural death; but in no case is it predicted, or can it be by us foreseen. No person, however, can have any right to conclude,

either that it does not exist, or that it may not be near. And then, observe, that although the unregenerate cannot be so in love with holiness as, for its own sake, earnestly to cry out for a new heart, they may be in such terror, perplexity, and distress, under the present consequences of sin, and the apprehension of other consequences yet ensuing—that their longing, their inquiries, their cries, their conflicts, and their defeats while they remain unrenewed, may have the effect of stirring them up to greater vigour and vigilance, after they are made “alive unto God.” The recollection of the time which they lost, the strength which they wasted, and the heavy burdens which they were made to bear, in the land of darkness and of bitter bondage, may prompt them afterwards to show the greater gratitude, devotedness, and love to the Author of their deliverance. They will understand better and adopt more devoutly the song of Moses and the children of Israel after passing through the Red Sea. They will sympathize more fully in the high and holy rapture with which, in the remembrance of Egypt, the ransomed of the Lord united in singing praise to the God of salvation.

But, in the next place, as to the principle involved in the view here exhibited, that the soul can have no direct or active share in the accomplishment of its own regeneration—it may just be stated that there is, in this, nothing more wonderful, or with the moral nature of man more incompatible, than there is in the act of originally creating, or of communicating ordinary natural life. In reference to either, the irreverent question may be put regarding the Divine agent, “Who hath resisted his will?” But this question the inspired Apostle meets with another—“Nay, but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to

Him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?" Where the change is determined on, it must, of course, to an infallible certainty, be accomplished. Yet, so far is the soul from feeling that constraint and compulsion are used with it, that, except in the most special and signal instances, it is not sensible of any foreign influence whatever being used. None of us were consulted when the faculties and capacities peculiar to our rational nature were originally bestowed; and who will complain of this as incompatible with, or an invasion of, our freedom! Moral liberty, if we speak intelligently, can mean nothing more than our being free, in subordination to the holy will of Him who made us, to act in conformity to the nature which belongs to us, and which He has originally constituted. In regeneration, there is effected a constitutional change in the state of our nature; but of this nature our *will* is a part, and, therefore, during the change, the will can no more be opposed to the change than it can be opposed to itself. The only difference, indeed, which our regeneration by the Spirit makes as to our moral liberty is this—that it is more perfect—more like that which man originally possessed when created in the unsullied image of God. Subsequently to "the renewing of the Holy Ghost," not only do we act, generally speaking, in unison with the nature which we possess, but that nature is then in harmony with, instead of being opposed to, the nature and will of Him whose image has been restored to our souls. We are drawn to Him, instead of being urged against our inclination. Is there compulsion, or anything contrary to nature, when the cold and solid ice melts under the rays of the returning sun? when, in the great ocean of air which surrounds the globe, the natural tendency from all parts is towards that which has been warmed

and rarified by his presence? or, when the daily flux and reflux of the tides spontaneously follow as it were the footsteps of the moon? Is there anything contrary to nature, when a ray of light, leaving the medium of water and passing into the medium of air, assumes a different line of direction in its flight? or, when the unbroken sunshine, darting through the countless drops of the copious shower, projects on the opposing sky all the matchless splendours and beauty of the rainbow?—The new creature, then, is “delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the sons of God.” “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.”

CHAPTER IV.

THE EVIDENCES OF REGENERATION.

CONSIDERING the nature, importance, and necessity of the great spiritual change of which we have been treating, and the deep personal concern which all who profess to be guided in their views by the Word of God, ought to feel in so momentous a subject,—it must obviously be of the very highest consequence, to ascertain, if possible, whether it is a change which they themselves have undergone. The evidences of the change, in other words, demand their most serious and immediate attention. These, therefore, are what we have now to investigate.

In this investigation, it is necessary, from the outset, carefully to distinguish between ambiguous or adventitious symptoms and those which afford infallible indications that the change in question has really been accomplished. From what we have already seen, it must, in ordinary cases, be quite unprofitable and idle to think of ascertaining the precise time, or instant, of its accomplishment. No change or event can be more certainly confined than this to a particular instant; but then there is no instant which it is more difficult to determine. It is, to be sure, the first moment in the life and history of a soul in its renovated state; but this, in most instances, may be the only thing remarkable in it; and if there is not some attendant circumstance fitted, in one way or

other, particularly to affect the mind, or to excite attention, it is inconceivable how it should, at any time afterwards, be referred to as a crisis the most important. We are far from denying that *any* have been, or can be, able to ascertain the *occasion* on which they were turned from darkness to light. In the case of some, the contrast may have been very marked—nay, very startling. They may have continued without concern, conviction, or alarm, up to the very last moment of their unregenerate state, and the next moment may have been deeply inscribed with some unambiguous evidence of a saving change,—such an instantaneous and conspicuous change as that which occurred, when God commanded the light to shine out of darkness! An experience of this kind, especially if followed by a course of steadfast self-denial, of holy fear and exemplary obedience, may leave no doubt either as to the nature or the date of the change which has taken place. Such cases, however, are comparatively rare, and so peculiar, that they cannot be regarded as furnishing any general criterion or test as to our spiritual state. It is more than probable that, in ordinary cases, the moment of regeneration has less in it to rivet our attention, excite our feelings, or lay hold on our memory, than many of the moments that precede or that follow it. Not unfrequently, therefore, the one may have been mistaken, and unduly magnified, for the other. That which is most arresting and arousing to the mind of the individual, is not necessarily the most demonstrative of the special agency of the Spirit. Jehovah was to pass by Elijah on the mount,—and, “Behold a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind, an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: and after the

earthquake, a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire, a still small voice;" and the Lord was in it, for that was itself the voice of the Lord.

Before passing from this part of the subject, it deserves to be noticed that, in speaking of the evidences of the new birth, the inspired writers never allude to the circumstance of being able to specify or fix upon its date. They are most earnest and importunate with the professing Christians whom they address, in exhorting them to examine into the state of their souls,—into the evidence of their being "in Christ," or new creatures,—but it is to something more important than the date of the change that the examination is to be directed. It is a singular and instructive fact, as has been well remarked, that the Apostle Paul, although his own conversion was just one of the most signal that ever occurred, and although the precise occasion and particular circumstances were so perfectly known to himself as to be repeatedly related or referred to as historical facts, never appeals to this miraculous occurrence as the ground of his hope and assurance, but to his having been, as a "partaker of the afflictions of the Gospel," cheered and sustained "by the power of God." "I have fought a good fight," says he; "I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."

But, in the next place, we may venture to affirm that no safe and decisive conclusion as to our having undergone a spiritual and saving change, can be drawn from any outward circumstances or inward emotions which have marked our religious experience. We may vividly remember, and be able accurately to describe,

many things which evince the soul's being under strong convictions of sin, and others again which intimate that it has obtained what it imagines, at least, to be deliverance and peace. Without pretending to trace or define the secret and sovereign work of the Divine Spirit, it may be possible to point out many touching circumstances which occur in the experience of persons whose regeneration has really taken place, and not till after they had long "walked according to the course of this world—fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind." An individual may have experienced the deepest convictions of guilt, and felt the most awful load of sin pressing on his conscience. He may have had the most painful consciousness of deserving, and the most insupportable dread of receiving the inflictions of the Divine indignation; and all his anguish and alarm may have been increased in intensity, by his perceiving no way of escape, and entertaining no hope of mercy. Some pointed arrow from the word of God, or some keen though polished shaft from the unconscious lips of one of God's messengers, may have acted on his soul as if it had seen the "flaming sword" of the Cherubim. The thoughts thus entering, like a flash of lightning, into his mind, although really in a way by no means supernatural, may have affected him very deeply. The truths suddenly and powerfully forced on his attention, may have shed a fearful light on his long established course of unconcern and ungodliness, or on some recent and reckless act of iniquity. His consequent agitation may have been such as to manifest itself even in his bodily and nervous system,—by tremblings, and faintings, and exclamations, and tears. This state of anguish, alarm, and agitation, may have been succeeded, after a longer or shorter interval, by one of peace, hope, and enjoyment. He

may have been filled with a strong and rapturous sense of God's mercy in Christ to sinners, and especially of his wonderful mercy and condescension to himself, as one of the greatest. He may have felt a glow and forth-going of affection to a Being at once so holy and so gracious ; and as these feelings were *new* to him, and as ardent as they were new, he may have fondly regarded them to be the undoubted and blessed evidences of a newness of heart.

This, however, is by no means a necessary and legitimate conclusion. Some, it is granted, who became truly the children of God, have passed through some such states of mind as have now been alluded to ; but the same may be affirmed of others whose moral conduct, after a temporary awakening and improvement, continued, to the last, to be plainly at variance with the love of Christ and the faith of the Gospel. Convictions of sin are no infallible signs or presages of conversion. Under such convictions, our first parents sought to "hide themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden ;" yet this was no symptom of their hearts returning to Him, for when called forth and interrogated, they were guilty of prevaricating, even to the God of truth, as to the cause of their attempted concealment ! The same remark may be made with regard to the horrors of remorse and the apprehensions of guilt. In whom were these feelings ever more strikingly evinced than in "the son of perdition ?" and yet his latter end was the most appalling instance of unbelief. Nay, did not the demons themselves cry out, "What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God ? Art thou come to torment us before the time ?" And yet "their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched."

Then, on the other hand, as to the approval which has sometimes come to be vividly felt by a sinner, of the

way of salvation revealed in the Gospel, and as to the relief and delight which he has then experienced,—it is well known that, while under the agonies and alarms of a conscience which something has occurred to awaken, nothing is more likely than that he should grasp at the first semblance of refuge and peace that comes in his way. Still without spiritual enlightenment, he may be the willing dupe of his own sudden but transitory impressions. Fancy may, in some respects, and for a season, usurp the office and assume the aspect of faith. He may, for the sin of blindly or wilfully rejecting the truth, often as it has been presented to him, receive “strong delusion that he should believe a lie.” We may confidently appeal to many a reader whether he has not repeatedly experienced a burst of emotion towards the Saviour, and secretly expressed to himself the most solemn purposes of devotedness to his service. We may confidently appeal to him whether he has not, for some time afterward, maintained a kind of passionate attachment to his ordinances, and manifested a wonderful zeal for religion, when, notwithstanding, it ultimately appeared, even to his own conviction and confusion, that he had, all the while, been spiritually dead, having only a name that he lived.

But it may be replied that, in some instances, these symptoms, or such as these, have, after a season of faintness and declension, again made their appearance. Be it so. New guilt may be followed by new alarm, and this may be quieted by new delusions, and these may be kept up by fresh acts of voluntary humility and a stricter attention to the forms of godliness. Nowhere has there been greater zeal, or greater show of religion than by the votaries of a false system or the corrupters of the true. Nay, it may safely be affirmed that, even although this

reappearance of concern and revival may be attended by a commendable and exemplary observance of moral duties, in all the relations of private, family, and social life,—they furnish no decisive evidence that a person is living “not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” We have already seen, while illustrating the *nature* of regeneration, to what astonishing lengths reformation may be carried, without sin being really slain, or the love of God implanted in the heart. Whatever confidence, therefore, an individual may feel as to his own state, and whatever credit he may, in regard to this, receive from others, he must have some more unequivocal evidence than this to produce, before it can be clearly ascertained that he may justly be esteemed a new creature in Christ Jesus.

Turning, then, from all those doubtful or deceitful appearances to which we have now had occasion to advert, let us observe that the only safe and certain rule for judging of men’s spiritual state, is that furnished by our Lord—“By their fruits ye shall know them.” By this test alone can we arrive at any right or satisfactory conclusion as to the regeneration either of ourselves or others. The Scriptures inform us not only in what the new birth consists, but also as to the consequences or effects by which it is invariably followed. Some of these invariable consequences, however, or some of its not less invariable concomitants, are themselves not easily traced or ascertained—such, for instance, as faith, repentance, justification, and adoption. Each of these is uniformly connected with the regeneration of the soul, in this way, at least, that wherever these exist, or have taken place, the fact of the soul’s being regenerated is necessarily implied. An infant may have been regenerated, although it is, as yet, incapable of repenting or

believing; but no person can have been made truly a partaker of faith or repentance, without having first—though it were but the instant before—been “born of the Spirit.” With regard to *faith*, in particular, the reference to its agency and effects is abundantly explicit. True faith is never alone. Hence the challenge of an inspired Apostle—“Show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works.” Another Apostle has mentioned faith as that by which “God is purifying the heart.” A third describes it as that “which worketh by love;” and a fourth represents it as that “which overcometh the world.” Not this only, however, but all the graces of the Spirit, wherever they are exhibited, bear decisive testimony to the regeneration of the soul. They are so intimately connected in the life of every true child of God, that one of them is often involved, as it were, in another. Thus, while overcoming the world is, as we have just seen, represented as an effect and triumph of *faith*, it is at the same time, and in a sentence immediately preceding, stated that faith is an effect and evidence of being *born of God*. In other words, faith in Christ is an evidence of regeneration, and overcoming the world—both its allurements and its threatenings—is an evidence both of faith and of the new birth. This reduplication of proof is very interesting; and in the practical illustrations on which we are now about to enter, we are more concerned to set forth, with precision and fulness, what the principal evidences of the new birth really are than to show any fastidious concern for keeping them logically distinct.

Of the Scripture evidences of regeneration, then, the first we have to mention is—

I. *Spirituality of mind.*

If "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God," it is naturally to be supposed that he who is born of the Spirit, and thereby constituted a new creature, will take delight in the things of the Spirit. Our Lord himself had said, "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things; and an evil man, out of the evil treasure, bringeth forth evil things." In accordance with this, the Apostle Paul says, "They that are after the flesh"—that is, still unregenerate—"do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit." He does not mean to intimate that they are, as yet, *altogether* spiritual—that the flesh has no longer any influence whatever over them—but only, that they are no longer under its dominion. Even of himself, indeed, he says, "For in me, (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing:" and, after explanation, he emphatically adds, "So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin." This is obviously the true position of all who have been born again; and when it can be ascertained that the feelings and continued experience of any man correspond with the description here given, it may warrantably be concluded that he is a new creature.

As such, it may well be supposed that one of the first symptoms that he will exhibit of the new birth, will be spirituality of mind—a growing relish and fitness for spiritual objects and exercises. Having been introduced into a new and purer atmosphere, he delights to inhale its freshness; and he gives forth, to all around him, the freshness and purity which he inhales. Like the perfume of the sweet violet in spring, or the fragrance of

the rose in summer, his spirit, language, and life are, to those who have intercourse with him, and can appreciate his character, as "the savour of life unto life." It is not more natural for the singing birds to delight in pouring forth their melody than it is for him to "praise with joyful lips" the Lord of his salvation. He does not seek to dwell alone, for it is his duty and his privilege to do good to others; but he seeks "to keep himself unspotted from the world," and, for this purpose, not only to "dwell in the secret place of the Most High," but there to enjoy the benefit and blessedness of spiritual fellowship. He regularly repairs to "the Fountain of living waters," and feels the enrichment of his spiritual life enhanced by his having to go thither daily to draw.

The Spirit of God dwells in those whom he has regenerated. He takes possession of them in the name of Him who redeemed them with his blood. This indwelling of the Spirit is expressly referred to as an evidence of their regeneration. "Ye are not in the flesh," says the Apostle, "but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you." And how is this indwelling ascertained? In this way: "As many as are *led* by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." And how can He be known to lead them, except they be found walking in the way of his commandments and ordinances? Under his blessed influence they endeavour to "set their affections on things above, not on things on the earth." They can say, in some measure, with Paul, "Our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ." Their "life is hid with Christ in God." Born of God, they now recognise Him as a reconciled father, and as a father, they love Him. This their love is no transient emotion which spends itself in fitful ardour, but is a

deep, devout, abiding affection, which lives within them, and leads them on in the earnest discharge of their various, and especially their religious duties. It acquires increasing fervour from every renewed approach to his throne.

They evince, under every variety of circumstances, the value which they attach to the privilege of being admitted into his presence, and the desire which they cherish for the enjoyment of his fellowship. They go to Him with the confession of their sins and their supplications for mercy. "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness; according unto the multitude of thy mercies, blot out my transgressions." They go to Him with their sorrows and perplexities. "From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the Rock that is higher than I." They go to Him for light when they are in darkness. "In thy light shall we see light." When they lack wisdom, they ask it of God. They go to Him in their helplessness, and when compassed with infirmities. "It is God that girdeth me with strength;" and it is He who has said, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness." They go to Him when they are assailed with temptation. Under the darkest and most afflictive dispensations, they hear Him saying, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." The heaviest of his chastisements do not drive them from Him, nor quench their hope in God. The afflicted believer is ready to reply, "I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that Thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me." "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." "They go to Him whenever they experience deliverance from trials, or an addition to their comforts. "O magnify the Lord with me,

and let us exalt his name together. I sought the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me from all 'my fears.' "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me?" "They go to 'Him oftener, and seek to have closer fellowship with Him as they feel that they are drawing near to death. "My flesh and my heart faileth ; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever." "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil ; for thou art with me ; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

This habit of constant reference to God, and of having recourse to Him under all the vicissitudes of human experience, will naturally be associated with the regular exercise of secret prayer. Such an exercise, when prompted and maintained by motives really devout, is as infallible a test of spirituality of mind as this spirituality is of having been born of the Spirit. "Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father." He who first taught and authorized those here spoken of to address God by this endearing name, does not fail to make them put a high value on the privilege of using it. He prompts, teaches, and assists them "in every thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, to let their requests be made known unto God." The regular observance of secret prayer affords a better criterion of religious character than either social or public prayer. When praying in secret, it cannot be alleged that the worshipper prays to be seen of men. At the same time, it must be remembered that something more than the mere regularity of the exercise in secret is necessary to make it a decisive test of spiritual character. In this regularity a man may, in some instances, be considerably influenced, not only by a regard to the opinion of those who

have an opportunity of observing so far his secret habits, but also by a certain amount of concern to stand well in his own estimation. He would not like to incur the self-reproach of frequently interrupting, any more than completely abandoning, the practice to which he was trained perhaps in early life by parents now deceased, and whose memory, for other reasons as well as this, he cannot but revere. Or it is a practice which he may have been led, under very peculiar and affecting circumstances, to adopt,—one which some very striking incident in providence may have induced him, after a season of declension and waywardness, to resume. It may be one concerning which he may have repeatedly formed, and very solemnly professed to Him “who seeth in secret,” the resolution of never allowing himself to forget or forsake; nay, the adoption and steadfast observance of which he may strenuously have inculcated on others, and these, perhaps, the members of his own family, and, moreover, the children of his own love.

Such considerations as these may go far with some individuals in maintaining the regular observance of secret prayer. Unless, however, there are higher motives along with, or independently of, these for the regularity of the exercise, its testimony on the side of their spiritual character will be of little value. To render it really valuable and decisive, it must proceed from a true love to God, a delight in his fellowship, a desire to be further conformed to his image, and a growing concern for his glory, as well as for the eternal interests of their own souls. But when the worshippers thus truly seek after God,—when they thus secretly, earnestly, and perseveringly call on his name,—and when, in every approach which they make to Him, they can, with great depth of reverence and humility, adopt the

words of the Psalmist, "O Lord, Thou hast searched me, and known me,"—then may it be safely concluded that they have been born of his Spirit, and adopted into his family. "The love of God,"—or a sense of his love toward us,—“is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us.” As this is increasingly felt, so is our love to Him in return increased. This at once implies and enlarges the spirituality of our views, affections, and employments; and all these serve to strengthen the evidence “that we are the children of God.” The Lord is the “portion” of his people, and they have the honour of being called “his heritage.” They delight in each other. They delight to sing, and He delights to hear, the songs of Zion. There is a fervour, feeling, and sweetness in the praises offered by them which others cannot reach. He “inhabiteth the praises of Israel;” and to Him they are sweet. He has furnished the theme; He has touched their hearts; He has put a new song in their mouths; He has fashioned their living harps, and taught them skilfully to use them.

II. *Another evidence or Scripture mark of Regeneration is—Reverent attention to the Word of God.*

This evidence is very intimately connected with the one which has already been considered, and does not require, therefore, any lengthened illustration.—“He that is of God,” said our Lord to the Jews, “heareth God’s words.” In another passage, this phrase, “He that is of God,” means one who is *from* God, or commissioned by Him; but in the passage to which reference is here made, (John vii. 47,) it is evidently equivalent to the expression, *One of God’s children.*

The relish which these have for spiritual things, will manifest itself by a reverence and relish for his Word, and a ready compliance with what it teaches and requires, in "all things pertaining to life and godliness." It is through the revelation of that Word that they have been made acquainted with the character and grace of Him with whom all of us have to do. It is that by which the Holy Spirit specially operates on the minds of all whom He turns from sin unto God; and it is natural, therefore, that they should be expected, as well as exhorted, "as new-born babes, to desire the sincere milk of the word, that they may grow thereby."

There are many persons who may, at times, anxiously dwell on some of the disclosures and declarations which the Scriptures contain, while their hearts are still unchanged, and they are still far from seeking to find in these Scriptures, or in the Saviour of whom they testify, the words of eternal life. Sometimes they are in search of what may seem to lend support to a favourite opinion, or of what may furnish an excuse or justification for a practice which, though more than questionable, they are unwilling to relinquish; or sometimes their researches are prosecuted only for the delight which they have in profound and abstruse speculations. Some have their minds occasionally riveted to parts of the Word of God, just as the mind of a criminal may be riveted to the words of his sentence; but like him, perhaps, they contemplate, in what they read or hear, only the severity of the law, the sternness of the judge, and the unalterableness of their doom—without exhibiting any signs of penitence, or any disposition to listen to the overtures of reconciliation.

It is not in this way, however, that the Word of God is regarded and treated by his regenerate offspring.

Being assured that He who has vouchsafed to furnish them with an authentic revelation of his will, has taken care to preserve it free from every possible adulteration, they hear without suspicion, believe without cavil, and comply without reluctance or complaint. That which He declares as a fact or promulgates as a truth, *is* a fact and a truth, although the explanation has been withheld, and is too much for them to discover, or even, perhaps, to comprehend. They know that this does not alter the reality of any fact or the soundness of any doctrine, and that it is by these themselves, and not by any metaphysical explanation of them, that the mind is to be morally influenced. However mortifying, therefore, any statement or doctrine may be to human pride,—however unpalatable it may be to many of the affections of the human heart,—however contrary it may be to current opinion or inveterate prejudice,—and however condemnatory it may be of past and prevailing conduct,—they do not, on any or all of these accounts, either question its accuracy or scruple to embrace it. Being satisfied that it comes from God, they count it worthy of all acceptation. They receive every communication which has proceeded from Him, with the profoundest reverence and the most implicit submission,—“casting down imaginations, and every thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.” They not only bow to every injunction, and subscribe to every doctrine, but they evince a constant and unfeigned desire to know more of the Divine will, and to enlarge their acquaintance with the Divine word. “Blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it,—that keep his testimonies, and seek Him with the whole heart.” “I will meditate on thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways. I will

delight myself in thy statutes; I will not forget thy word."

Now, every competent and impartial observer will be ready to admit, that such attention, submission, and attachment to the Word of God, bear evidence to a change of heart. Who will deny that the manifestation of these dispositions and feelings demonstrates the fulfilment of that gracious promise, "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people?" We have, in their case, to account for attention being won to the Word of God, not by the beauty of language—though the language is, indeed, most beautiful; not by the description of manners—though these are peculiar and striking; not by the delineations of character, however attractive; not by the remarkableness of the facts and events related, however momentous and marvellous; not by the variety and interest of the incidents, however diversified and interesting; not by the pathos of certain scenes and passages, however pathetic and overwhelming; and, above all, not by any sentiment, address, or insinuation calculated to arouse or engage the sensual or unsanctified affections of the human heart. We have to account for the attention of persons who once, and, perhaps, till lately, were accustomed to say in their hearts to God, "Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways," being drawn to, and fastened on the testimony and the love of God. It is attention to commandments which they once considered to be grievous,—to duties which they once felt to be wearisome and thought to be unnecessary,—to objects which they once esteemed to be paltry or visionary,—to doctrines which they once held to be unsupported, unintelligible, or repugnant,—to promises which they once regarded as idle and delu-

sive tales,—to threatenings which once sounded as mere words employed by gloomy superstition to inspire fear, —to persuasions which, at one time, they would have heard with impatience, or else with indifference,—and to entreaties to which they would once have turned a deaf and contemptuous ear. They were like a wayward and unfeeling son, whom neither the beseeching look, nor the tearful eye, nor the quivering lip, nor the faltering voice, nor the piercing supplication of his parent can divert from his purpose, or reclaim from his evil habits, though they are alike sinful and fatal. The reverent and earnest attention which they now give to the word of God can be explained only on the supposition that the soul has been born again,—of which change, therefore, it is unquestionably a most conclusive evidence.

III. *A third evidence of Regeneration is—Faith in Jesus Christ.*

“Whosoever,” says the Evangelist and Apostle in his first epistle, “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God.” Believing in Christ implies, not only that we believe the record that God has given of his Son, but that, on the authority of that record, and in obedience to the commands of Him from whom it came, we receive and rely on Christ himself, as there set forth. Really to believe in him as set forth in the Gospel, is to be really a Christian,—and this is to be a new creature. Of this new creation, the verse which has been quoted affirms that faith in Jesus Christ is a proof; and the affirmation is made in such a manner as to prove, at the same time, that the power of believing is a direct consequence of the Spirit’s regenerating agency on the soul. “No man,” says the Apostle Paul, “can

say that Jesus Christ is Lord, but by the Holy Ghost." The same truth in other words, is stated by Jesus himself. When, in answer to his question, "Whom say ye that I am?" Peter replied, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God,"—his striking remark was, "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven." These Scriptures clearly mark the origin of this faith, and clearly show how it stands connected with regeneration,—just as another passage evinces that *adoption* is the immediate privilege which the Son of God bestows on all who are born again, and who have in consequence received him: "To as many as received him, to them gave he power"—the right or privilege—"to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name."

There is no single circumstance by which the character of the unregenerate is more deeply marked than their "not believing"—their refusing to believe—"in the name of the Only-begotten Son of God." Not all the adaptation of the Gospel to the condition of fallen man,—not all the compassion which it breathes, all the sanctity which it inculcates and imparts, and all the blessedness which it offers,—can earn for it, without the immediate agency of the Spirit on the understanding and the heart, the acceptance of those whom it is calculated to save. Nay, the very purity which sheds around it the lustre of heaven, and which tells at once of its lineage and its aim, is that to which there is, in the mind of man, such a contrast and such an aversion, that it stands in the way of its adoption and advancement. Its cordial and unqualified acceptance, therefore, is one of the most unequivocal evidences that can be exhibited of a positive and thorough change of heart. The reality of this acceptance, however,—the existence of this faith,—is

itself a thing not always easy to be ascertained. It can be fully established only by its fruits ; and, without an accurate knowledge of these, they cannot, of course, be distinguished. Some of the most obvious of them will, by and by, be considered, as separate evidences of regeneration ; but, without anticipating what may then be advanced, we shall now make one or two remarks as to what that faith is, which is expressly mentioned in Scripture as a specific mark or characteristic of all who have been born of God.

In doing this, we do not mean to enter on any metaphysical explanation of the act or state of the mind in believing, or to allege that, with respect to the mere *mental operation*, belief in Christ is essentially different from belief in any other being. This mere mental operation is, in every case, too well understood to require, and too simple to admit of, any definition more clear than the ordinary and familiar term by which it is expressed. The nature of *belief* is not affected by any difference in the nature of the things which are believed,—in the position of the persons on whose statements or promises we rely,—in the grounds on which our conviction rests,—in the agency or the means by which it is produced,—or in the process by which these grounds are distinctly perceived. It is necessary to discriminate between belief itself and the things which it embraces, the evidence on which it is founded, and the way in which it has been called forth. It is the want of attention to these obvious distinctions that has occasioned much of the confusion, inaccuracy, and mysticism which have prevailed in what has been advanced on this subject.

That a sinner's believing in Christ has in it nothing peculiar, extraordinary, or mysterious, it were altogether unwarrantable to assert. The very reverse is the fact.

The mystery, however, is either in the things which are believed,—or in the manner in which the carnal mind, naturally averse and unable to receive the things of the Spirit of God, is induced and enabled to believe them,—or in the manner in which it is endowed with the capacity of spiritual discernment. This, in short, is just the mystery of the Spirit's immediate and special operation in regenerating the soul. We have already seen that, whatever be the character and amount of the evidence which is exhibited to the natural man, the eyes of his understanding must be divinely enlightened before he can really and cordially embrace Jesus Christ, and rest on him alone for salvation. But this is not the subject on which we have at present to offer any further remarks. On the supposition that this faith in Christ actually and already exists, we have, at present, to consider only how it may be regarded as an evidence of regeneration. For this purpose, let us attend to the following circumstances, illustrative of the nature, influence, and effects of this principle.

1. In the first place, all who believe in Christ believe in One who is alike *faithful and infallible*. He is alike incapable of deceiving and of being deceived. His veracity is not more unimpeachable than his knowledge and understanding are infinite. When we believe in a fellow-creature, who appeals to no higher authority than his own for his averments and for the fulfilment of his promises, we may have the best reason in the world for relying on his integrity. We may be satisfied that he will not state as a fact which he knows, that which is only an opinion; and that he will not maintain as absolutely certain, that which he does not know to be more than highly probable. Our confidence in him may be justly such, that, on his word alone, we may be thor-

oughly persuaded of the truth of many things which are to us both new and unaccountable. Yet, owing to the limited and often imperfect nature of human observation, —owing to some inadvertency, some error or defect in judgment, or some unconscious bias of mind,—he may, in some cases, be mistaken. We may, therefore, sometimes suspend our belief, even while we continue certain that he will never intentionally misinform or deceive us. In short, we may believe in many a man as honest and well-informed, but we cannot believe in any mere man as infallible. With respect to Christ and the Scriptures which testify of Him, the case is widely different. On such authority the individual who believes at all, is ready to believe every thing. His confidence is not only implicit, but unlimited.

The grounds on which true faith in Christ is made to rest are as peculiar as they are secure. Those who are partakers of this precious faith believe in him, not merely because of the profound wisdom embodied in his words, the revelation of truths which no other man could unfold, or the exhibition of such a knowledge of their own hearts as no other man could possess. They believe in him for the sake of works and attributes of the loftiest character. He has not only imparted to them the most transcendent truths, and fulfilled the most momentous promises,—such as those connected with his own resurrection from the dead,—but, in this and the other miracles which he performed, he has shown himself to be both the Truth and the Mighty Power of God. It is true that since he left this earth and ascended up where he was before, believers have not been “eye-witnesses of his majesty.” For the knowledge of his doctrines, predictions, and miracles, they are dependent on others; but then these others had all

the advantage of being actually with him. They had plain, palpable, incontrovertible facts on which to rest their own belief; and they were enabled by Him to exhibit similar facts for obtaining the confidence of those to whom they were sent. For their sincerity, they have given the testimony of their blood; and for the marvellous support which they experienced, they have left us the evidence of triumphs over the most rooted, and violent, and diversified opposition. It is still, therefore, in reality, "for the works' sake" that we are required "to believe in him." The faith of his followers still "stands, not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God."

It is to be observed, however, that this faith admits of different degrees. It may be more or less enlightened, and more or less vigorous. One of the very things which it holds, is the conviction that He changes not, because in Him "are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge," and "in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." But the length of time that believers have been in that state,—the frequency and severity with which their faith has been tried,—the amount of what has been revealed or unfolded to it,—and the extent to which the sanctification of their hearts has been carried,—will necessarily affect the measure of their faith. In some, it may be "as a grain of mustard seed;" in others, such as might "remove mountains;" and all this, although it is, in every one of them, the gift of the same Spirit, and although every one of them has all his hope and confidence placed in the same unchangeable and all-sufficient Saviour. But whatever be its measure or its strength, it needs to rest on "the very Christ,"—"the Christ of God,"—to embrace Him and his whole truth, or at least nothing which is incompatible with this. Such a faith can never be dead or unproductive. That which is rooted

in Him must and cannot but bear fruit to his glory. It may, at times, be languishing, and, especially in its earlier stages, appear to be overborne or even ready to die; but a time of refreshing and revival is provided for and certain to arrive. It lives in the hearts of those who have been "born again, not of corruptible seed but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever."

2. In the next place, the things which the faith of which we are speaking is required to embrace, are of the most *peculiar and momentous nature*. Jesus claims to be not only one who is sent of God, but the Son of God, and one with the Father. He comes to us in this character, and tells us all have sinned,—that, by nature, all are corrupt and under the wrath of God,—that, from that wrath, none can by any means deliver themselves,—that none can enter into the kingdom of God without being born again,—that, except we repent, we shall all certainly perish,—that He has come to seek and to save that which was lost,—that God is in Him reconciling sinners unto Himself, not imputing unto men their trespasses,—and that those who come to Him, or accept of his offer of salvation, he will in nowise cast out. He tells us that He is willing, as well as able, to save sinners, even the chief, but that "Now is the accepted time, behold, now is the day of salvation." In other words, He demands an *immediate* renunciation of sin, and an immediate acceptance of the salvation which He offers. He tells us that the eternal life which He promises is infinitely preferable, not only to the final portion of the ungodly, but to the general enjoyments which, in this life, they pursue,—and that we are bound, for the sake of it, forthwith and *from this moment*, to deny ourselves

to any allurements or gratifications which sin may present.

Some, nay, several of these positions may be believed, but this much merely, is not believing in *Him*. The person who truly believes in Him must believe that, in all things he is entitled to belief, and that, in all things, he must have the pre-eminence. He must count him so worthy of all acceptance as to accept of him without delay, without reluctance, and without reserve. Christ challenges our belief, not only of certain most momentous truths, but also of certain promises of blessings, either immediate or prospective. The belief of the latter is called reliance or trust; and the belief of the former involves, or is equivalent to acceptance. Whatever convictions, therefore, we may have of the truth of the *doctrines* which He has promulgated, we may, nevertheless, be guilty of unbelief, and unbelief the most sinful, offensive, and impious. To make light of his overtures of mercy, is both to distrust and to reject Him. It is true that He has called some into his vineyard at the eleventh hour; but, while this was meant to show that those who *at* the eleventh hour feel themselves destitute, need not despair,—it certainly was not meant to give any countenance to the idea that those who are at the third or the sixth hour, may, without much either of guilt or of danger, disregard the Saviour's invitation, or wait till the eleventh hour arrives. "To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." A regenerate soul is willing to follow him *now*, and to follow him whithersoever he leads. Christ's hardest sayings he is willing to believe; and he cordially adopts the sentiment that it is "better to crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts," or even "to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season,"—a season, which at

best is very short, and the lengthening of which makes it only the more disastrous and deplorable.

From an attentive consideration of such circumstances as those to which attention has now been directed, we may perceive what is essential to true faith in Christ, and may, to some extent, be enabled to judge, at least in our particular case, as to its actual existence. And if, after such a serious consideration of them as they demand, we find reason to conclude that we really *do* believe in Him, then may we be sure that we have just equal reason to conclude that we have been born of the Spirit.

And now, as to the ways in which this faith which the regenerate repose in Christ will manifest itself—little needs be said. The emotions which it produces, the impression which it leaves, or the purposes which it calls into action, will depend on the nature of the truth, promise, or offer with which it has more immediately to do. If it is a denunciation against sin with which it has to do, the believer may judge of his faith, by his feeling that he stands in awe. If it is a precept that is delivered, or a sacrifice that is demanded, faith will be evinced by unfeigned compliance or implicit submission. If it is an offer that is made, or a pledge that is given, faith will be manifested by instantly embracing the offer, and by relying, with joyful anticipation, on the certainty that the pledge will be redeemed. When faith, again, listens to all the tender entreaties, all the compassionate bewailings, all the solemn assurances, and all the gracious pledges and undertakings of the Redeemer's love,—when it looks to the glory which He left, and the humiliation in which He appeared,—to the miracles which He wrought, and the toils which he endured,—to the Cross on which He died, the tomb in which He lay, and the

cloud of glory through which he ascended into heaven,—it furnishes to the regenerate soul fresh cause for loving Him by whom it first was loved. Under the darkest dispensations of providence, and the most startling vicissitudes of life, it contemplates Him to whom all power in heaven and on earth has been given, and who will make “all things work together for good to them that love God.” It thus keeps the mind from sinking into despondency, or giving way to complaint. It sees afar off the glorious fulfilment of prophecy. It stations itself with the angel on the confines of this devoted earth; it catches a glimpse of the world of spirits, and of the glory which is yet to be revealed; and, at the close of the sternest conflict, and after the most complicated sufferings and trials, it enables its possessors to exclaim, “Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.”

IV.—*A fourth evidence of Regeneration is—Brotherly Love.*

We have already seen how natural it is for every one who is born of the Spirit to love all spiritual persons, and to take an interest in all spiritual objects. Faith keeps before his view the features of their loveliness, the impression of which is thus continually renewed on his heart. Accordingly, we find that no sooner does the Apostle refer to faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and represent it as an evidence of being born again, than he adds, “And every one that loveth Him that begat, loveth Him also that is begotten of Him.” Our love of Christ, and of the brethren, his spiritual children, are inseparably connected, and are, both of them, appropriate and convincing evidences of our having

been renewed in the spirit of our minds. "We know," says the same inspired author, "that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren; he that loveth not his brother abideth in death.—Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God." And that which is a proof of our being the sons of God is also a proof of our being the disciples of Christ. "By this," said Jesus himself, "shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."

To distinguish this "brotherly love" from those affections with which it has something in common, we must keep in view its nature and origin, the objects on which it specially rests, the ends at which it aims, and the manifestations in which it delights. Even in the natural man we sometimes find the sweetest temper, the most amiable dispositions, the most devoted affection, and the most benevolent purposes, strikingly combined. But the heart of the natural man, as such, cannot be the seat of that love which we are now considering. It is susceptible, no doubt, of many amiable and praiseworthy affections. It is the heart of those, nevertheless, many of whom are "living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another." In the renewed heart, on the other hand, in which alone brotherly love can have its abode, these malignant passions can never again usurp a commanding influence. The love of "the brotherhood," associated as it ever is with "the love of Christ," contemplates objects far lovelier, and aims at results far purer and loftier, than any with which merely natural affection can possibly be occupied. The very qualities which distinguish one who is a disciple of Christ and a true child of God, are qualities on account of which the world hates him, and which it would far rather banish or

destroy than imitate. The natural man, who is destitute of these himself, neither loves nor fully perceives them in others. He may feel a certain species of love to some who possess them, but his love is attracted by something else than the peculiar qualities which adorn the character of the regenerate. The child of God, on the contrary, not only regards as the special objects of his love those whom he believes to be more or less conformed to the image of the Son of God, but it is on account of that conformity that he esteems and loves them. He delights in the excellences which they possess; and there is no way in which his love would more naturally seek to show itself than by seeking to imitate these excellences, and to exalt them to a higher degree, so as to be still more worthy of imitation. He feels and cherishes a compassionate and benevolent interest in the welfare of his brethren of mankind at large, and more especially of those around him. His love outdoes or surpasses mere human friendship, however refined, and however ardent, and mere human kindness, however sincere and enlarged. But while he desires, as he has opportunity, to "do good unto all men, it is especially unto them who are of the household of faith." His love is, as it were, a transcript or an emanation of the love which God himself has manifested towards his creatures, when He says, "I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me." The child of God, like God himself, has a special delight in the fellowship of the saints! His affections flow forth in all their tenderness, fulness, and fervour towards those whom the Spirit of God has rendered peculiarly amiable. His love toward them is such as none can feel who do not love their God; and it is this by

which it is so strikingly distinguished from mere natural affection.

A man, in being born again, has the substance of the Divine law, in both its great leading branches, written anew on his heart. He loves both God and his fellow-man, in some measure as the law requires him to love; and hence the Scriptures refer us either to his love of the one or to his love of the other, for an evidence of the spiritual change which he has experienced. All the manifestations of his love towards either, are just so many evidences of his having passed from death unto life. This love, in other words, is just the sanctification of all his social affections. Those whom he specially loves, and may all along have loved, he now loves "in the Lord." Where such love breathes and prevails, there is no keen contention, no narrow-minded bigotry, no party virulence, no sectarian jealousy. It does more than can be done by the sweetest temper, the softest language, the most conciliating manner, and the most dignified and patient forbearance. It combines them all, and lends to each the grace and sanctity of those who dwell in the mansions of everlasting peace. It calms down and charms away the evil passions which engender discord in private or social life; and it gives a new impulse as well as a peculiar sacredness to all the emotions and enterprises of Christian benevolence. Does the man whom this principle actuates stand, for instance, in the relation of a parent? Then will his parental affection be directed to nobler objects, and displayed by holier endearments than others either estimate or employ. It will appear in something which is far better than the lavishing of caresses, the removing of restraints, or the multiplying of indulgences. It will

appear in his early and frequently conducting his children to the Saviour, that he may commit them into his arms, and commend them to his blessing. Does he stand in the relation of a friend? Then there will be not only a sincerity and devotedness, but an elevation and durability in his friendship. The interests which it will chiefly aim at promoting will be those which relate to the spiritual and eternal condition of man. His object will be the cultivation of a friendship on which the friend of Lazarus himself may smile, and the parties in which may ultimately welcome each other in the everlasting habitations. To the relation of friendship is there superadded the sacred intimacy of conjugal union? Then that which is the most hallowed, intimate, and endearing of all human ties, is rendered all the more so, by his constantly seeking that it may be consecrated by a closer union, of the heart of both parties, to Him by whom they shall hereafter be constituted as the angels of God.

He whose soul is under the pervading influence of the brotherly love which we have now been considering, is an illustration of the remark that a true Christian is the highest and noblest style of man. We have seen who are the persons on whom, and what are the objects on which, it specially rests—the blessed results at which it aims—and the congenial expressions by which it shows itself; and, reflecting on all of these, it is impossible for us not to perceive that the individual in whom such an affection is thus manifested, cannot but be one who has been truly regenerated. The mellowness of the clustered grapes is not a more certain proof of the genial atmosphere in which they have enlarged and ripened, nor the shining of the brightest planet a

more certain proof that it is flooded with the light of the sun, than genuine brotherly love is a demonstration that the soul has been born again.

V. *A fifth evidence of Regeneration is—Humility.*

The evidences of regeneration are as numerous as the fruits of the Spirit. Of these, humility, as one of the most important and conspicuous, is here entitled to full consideration. It is one of the graces of the Christian character, and therefore one of the proofs of the great spiritual change in the sinner who is regenerated. It is a grace which is highly commended and earnestly inculcated in the Word of God, and one of which there is presented to us many instructive and striking examples, especially in the person and history of the Saviour himself.

Humility, or “humbleness of mind,” is significantly combined in apostolic exhortation with “kindness, meekness, and long-suffering.” It implies a feeling of our defects and demerits in the sight of God, and such a feeling of them that we are disposed to regard them as greater than the defects and demerits of others. The man of humility recognises the importance of the exhortation, “not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly.” He is always more disposed to think of his coming short of the glory of God, and of the standard of the Gospel, than to think of the comparative deficiencies and delinquencies of his brethren. He may in heart and life be decidedly different from those who are still in their natural state; nay, he may be, in point of fact, distinguished even among the people of God for the measure of his spiritual gifts and attainments, yet he is fully aware that this can

furnish no ground for confident boasting. It just serves to remind him that "he has nothing which he has not received." It reminds him of the wholesome question, "Who maketh thee to differ?" It prompts him to adopt the devout, grateful, and humble language of the Apostle, "By the grace of God I am what I am."—"God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."

The sin of our first parents—the very sin which entailed the loss of that Divine image which it is the object of the Holy Spirit in regeneration to restore—was a sin directly the opposite of humility. It was the ambition of tasting or knowing what God had specified as, not without guilt and misery, to be tasted or known. It was this which led to the apostacy, alienation, and expulsion of man from his blessed and beneficent Creator. The natural man is still actuated by vanity in himself, and by pride toward his brethren. Vanity courts applause, and pride exacts deference and expects homage. In the same mind, these feelings may sometimes be at a loss to adjust matters between them; but they are both incompatible with humility. They are so firmly and peculiarly rooted in our constitution as fallen and rebellious creatures, that they are among the last which grace itself is found to subdue. They resemble those substances which resist the greatest degrees of heat, which retain their solidity and hardness when others around them have melted, and which, even when on the point of melting, immediately evince their obduracy by returning to their original state, if the action of the heat applied to them is, in the slightest degree diminished. The existence of humility, therefore, is one of the most conclusive evidences of that change by

which alone the vain-glorious and arrogant feelings of our degenerate constitution can be counteracted.

To be partakers of genuine humility is to be rich, yet ever to acknowledge the hand that daily feeds us. It is to trust in God, and not in uncertain riches. It is to condescend to men of low estate, but without seeking to make them feel that we are exercising condescension. It is to be poor, yet neither to be discontented with our poverty, nor to indulge in murmurs or reproaches against the rich. It is to be prosperous, yet in our prosperity to give God the glory. It is to be applauded, and yet to convert applause into a showing forth of his praise. It is to be reviled, yet to pray for and bless our revilers. It is to be brought low, yet, in deepest affliction, to bear all patiently, but without inviting attention to the patience, or, in this case, rather to the vain-glory which we display. It is to be willing to be taught by an inferior, or outdone by one who hitherto has been no more than an equal. It is to contemplate the rapid exaltation of a companion, and the unlooked-for success of a rival, without any feeling of mortification or envy. It is to meet with those who have known us in better circumstances, and yet to feel neither aversion nor peevishness because we have fallen beneath them. It is, on the other hand, to meet in our affluence with those who could remind us of our once humble condition—perhaps, too, of our ungodliness—and yet to owe them no grudge on account of their knowledge, but, on the contrary, to be less concerned about their power of telling what we were, than grateful to Him who, besides improving our position in society, has placed us in a new relation to himself, “quickened us together with Christ,” and constituted us his own children. It is to confess a fault, without seeking to retaliate perhaps a

more serious charge against the person who reminds us of it; and to be ready to profit by reproof, although we may feel that we owe nothing to the delicacy or motives of the reprover. These are manifestations of genuine humility, as this itself is an evidence of having been born again.

Humility may well occupy a high rank among the graces of a Christian, when we consider how conspicuous it was among the attributes of Christ. It was by a reference to this, that He encouraged sinners to learn of Him, and to come to Him for rest. "Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls." His meekness and lowliness were conspicuous to the very last—even when, amidst the hosannas of the multitudes, He, in triumphant procession, entered Jerusalem, as the son of David—the acknowledged Messiah. It is by a reference to his example that the Apostles enforce their exhortations as to humility and patience under suffering. "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of man: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Well, then, may the admonition be addressed to his disciples, "Be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility; for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble."

But that humility which is so decisive a mark, and so becoming an ornament, of Christian character, is ever increasing, in proportion generally as its possessor rises to higher eminence in his other graces. It was a deeper

feeling in the breasts of Moses and Elias when, on the mount of transfiguration, they appeared with Jesus in glory, than it was in the breasts of Peter, James, and John who, on beholding that celestial interview, fell on their faces and were sore afraid. What are all present earthly distinctions compared with the difference between the saints whom the Lord shall bring with him, at his second coming, and those who, though about to be changed, shall still be "of the earth, earthy?" Yet the former shall, even then, excel the latter in humility, not less than in the beauty of holiness. The spirit which has just taken its departure from its earthly tabernacle, and been glorified on its admission into the presence of its enthroned and glorified Redeemer, obtains such a bright and overwhelming view of his Divine Majesty, as to have its feeling of humility deepened by the very thought of its wondrous and unmerited exaltation. It meets, on his part, with an act of condescension even in this, which fills it with the profoundest admiration and gratitude. Humility, like love itself, "never faileth." In receiving the "crown of glory that fadeth not away," it stoops with it and adores at the footstool of Him who purchased and bestowed it. This humility is the upper robe which marks even in heaven the children of God.

VI. *A sixth evidence of Regeneration is—Overcoming the World.*

Under a previous section, we have endeavoured to show that one of the Scripture marks or evidences of Regeneration is Faith in Jesus Christ; and, in the very passage where this is stated, the inspired Apostle also states that this faith "overcometh the world." The connection of these things is thus abundantly plain.

Faith is an evidence, because an effect, of regeneration, and overcoming the world is an evidence or consequence of faith. We are not left to a mere inference on the subject, however irresistible and important. The Apostle, still in the same passage, comes forth with the direct and explicit statement that "Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world,"—although it is, no doubt, through faith, in every instance, that this is accomplished.

Let us attend, then, for a little, to this important statement. The world is not easily overcome. The children of this world,—that is, all mankind in their natural state,—are under its powerful dominion. "The friendship of the world is enmity with God." To all it may be said, "In time past ye walked according to the course of this world." "We all had our conversation," says St. Paul, "in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind." "The prince of the world" is just "the spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience," "who are taken captive by him at his will." They are fascinated by the world's allurements, ensnared by its vices, in bondage to its maxims, and intimidated by its threatenings or its frowns. In these circumstances, it is as vain to expect that they can overcome the world as that a bound slave should rise and overpower a band of oppressors, and that, too, while in his breast there did not glow one single spark of the love of liberty. It may, and it does, often happen that, as the world has such a multitude and variety of allurements to employ, some of these may be resisted or relinquished by its votaries, for the sake of others deemed more congenial or advantageous, or felt to be more irresistible. Some may refrain from dissipation and intemperance, only because they are avariciously toiling to be rich. Others may care comparatively little for the

pleasure of riches, only because they worship a different idol, and are actuated by the master passion of ambition. Some may be honest, only because they find honesty to be the best policy, and best fitted to promote their temporal advantage; and others may be just, only because they dread the resentment or retaliation which injustice might provoke. Self-denial and sacrifices, either of pleasure or of profit, for the sake of principle alone, are not to be expected on the part of those who are still the children of this world. These sacrifices and conquests would imply and illustrate that very change the evidence of which we are now considering.

When we behold a boon companion of ungodly, profane, and licentious men, renounce their society, abandon their practices, abjure their pleasures, and stand proof against their taunts, their ridicule, and their calumnies,—we have an evidence of a moral change within him, similar to that which, although in circumstances more signal, is presented in the conversion of the Apostle Paul,—of him who then “preached the faith which once he destroyed,”—who welcomed bonds and afflictions for the sake of that Jesus whose disciples he had, at one time, and up to the last, haled to prison, and delivered over unto death. When we see, in like manner, men renouncing the systems of superstition and delusion in which they have been educated, and by which many of their ruling passions have been fostered,—when we see them taking joyfully the spoiling of their goods and the violation of their privileges,—when we see them unprovoked by the mockings and unappalled by the threatenings of their incensed countrymen or kinsmen,—when we see them mournfully bearing a parent’s reproaches, and melted to pity by a parent’s tears, but not moved away from the faith of the Gospel which they have

openly espoused,—we can be at no loss to explain the secret of their resolution and their strength. At the invitation of the Saviour, they have taken up their cross to follow Him, as his disciples. The language of the Apostle which they seem warranted to adopt is that in which he says, “Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it; being defamed, we entreat.”

It is not enough, for deciding on our spiritual state, that we can appeal to some cases in which we have striven successfully against some favourite and besetting sin. We must consider whether the spell of its influence has not been for the time dissolved, merely by the counter-spell of another sin, less glaring, but not less ruinous to the soul; or whether its being dissolved has been accompanied by a diminished love, nay, a decided hatred, for that sin, and all sin whatever. It is of little comparative consequence to a slave that he changes his master, that his chain is gilded, or that his fetters are lined with down and covered with silk. To judge fairly of our state, we must consider how we are accustomed to decide when the things of God and the things of the world are brought into immediate competition. Setting aside particular instances of sudden and violent temptation, what takes place when the pleasures and the profits in which the children of this world delight, are brought within our reach and pressed on our acceptance? Is it then that our faith evinces its strength and achieves its victories? Is it then that we feel most encouraged to conclude that our affections are set on things which are above? Is it then that we may most safely congratulate ourselves that we are the disciples of Christ? that we can still acknowledge that his yoke is easy, and honestly consent to his law that it is holy, and just, and good? Is it then that the inmost feelings and desires of

our hearts, if fully known to others, would serve both to exalt us in their estimation, and to uphold the honour of that holy religion by which we profess to be influenced?

But it is not merely in regard to the pleasures and profits of the world that our superiority to it must be evinced, if we would justly be regarded as new creatures. It must also be evinced in the midst of all that the world can threaten or inflict. The world and the things which are in the world, not only inflict injury on a disciple, and occasion him various tribulations, but they contribute to embitter every suffering and sorrow with which he is visited. When the hand of the Lord has touched him,—when He has swept from him the means of life,—when He has bereaved him of his family and bowed him to the earth with personal distress,—then may his mind be invaded by the suggestions which are current in a world that knows not God. Then may it insinuate doubts as to the equity of the Divine government,—then may it bring before him, again and again, the enjoyments which others still possess, but which he now possesses no longer,—then may it take a malicious pleasure in making him imagine that none are left to care for, or even to pity him,—then may it instigate murmurs against Providence and peevishness toward men, and aggravate all his trials by harassing him with the thought that his religion neither exempts him from calamities nor increases his ability to bear them. But yet, in all this furnace of affliction, the real child of God will be enabled not only to endure but to overcome, when thus subjected to trial. Through faith, he will overcome the world. He will put forth the prayer of faith to that God who afflicteth not willingly, and his own children never but in faithfulness and in love. If, in such circumstances, our faith, though sorely tried,

sinks not but obtains the victory, then have we the testimony of his holy word that we have passed through the auspicious and happy change by which we are constituted his spiritual children.

VII. *A seventh evidence or Scripture mark of Regeneration is—Habitual and universal holiness.*

This evidence is very distinctly and specially referred to by the Apostle, in the following passages of his first epistle:—"Little children—If ye know that God is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of Him." "Whosoever is born of God, doth not commit sin: for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the Devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God."—"We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not."

God himself is "glorious in holiness." With Him there is no unrighteousness. "The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works." Now, it was after this his own moral image that He created man at first, and the manifestation of that image anew in the heart and character of man affords the clearest evidence of his having been born again. Such a manifestation is as unquestionable an evidence of the second birth as the pure light of the moon, when, after having been under an eclipse, she is seen walking in brightness, is a proof that the light of the sun is again falling full on her orb, and shed around her path. "The imagination of man's heart," in his natural state, "is evil from his youth,"—nay, "only evil continually;" and if, therefore, the gene-

ral tenor of an individual's life becomes such as to show that the current of his thoughts is really and steadily directed to that which is good, then is there corresponding evidence that his heart has been changed,—changed by that Being who alone knows all that is in it, who alone has power over it, and in whose hand it is “as the rivers of water.”

The test or evidence here referred to is, of course, the general tenor of life, comprehending both the prevailing dispositions of the heart and those outward actions, within the reach of observation, by which alone any safe conclusion can be formed as to the hearts of others. Our attention is directed not to transient and occasional feelings, desires, and states of mind,—not to single acts or incidental and unusual exhibitions of conduct,—but to the general dispositions and habits by which we are individually distinguished. When the Apostle tells us, in the language already quoted, that he who is born of God sinneth not, or doth not commit sin, he plainly means that it is that which he does not deliberately and habitually commit—that it is that in which he does not delight, and that which he consequently does not *practise*. He represents him, on the contrary, as doing, or practising righteousness: but then he reminds us that “if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” “In many things,” says another Apostle, “we offend all”—all of us offend. The regenerate are thus still sinners, but they are no longer to be classed with the “workers of iniquity.” The test to which, in these passages, we are directed, is of a two-fold character. It has to do both with what the new man does *not* practise, and with what he *does* practise.

In the first place, it is intimated that a man who is born of God does not practise or indulge in sin. It

may still occasionally obtain a temporary ascendancy. It is not yet thoroughly subdued. His sanctification is not yet complete. But there is begun with sin a warfare which intimates "that with the mind he can no longer serve the law of sin," or "obey it in the lusts thereof." When he falls into any act that is sinful, he will not now seek to blind himself to its sinfulness. With a keener sensitiveness to the guilt and evil of sin, he will be less liable to be overcome by temptation, though more alive to its insidious approaches. He is habitually on his guard, not only against open and grosser sins, but also against secret faults. He knows that God sets these in the light of his countenance, and in that light the child of God himself seeks to judge of their true character. He is concerned to think, not merely how his sins would be regarded by men, but how they are regarded by Him of whose law the very least of them is a transgression. He knows that sins may, in this world, receive light names, and meet with lenient treatment, and yet lead to most dreadful consequences in the next. Fashionable sins are just those in regard to which he is jealous over himself "with godly jealousy;" for they are those which so many in society have agreed to varnish,—agreeing to call evil good, to put darkness for light, and to put bitter for sweet. Such sins appear to him as the fruits of a conspiracy to undermine, if not daringly to impugn, the law of God. They embody such a falsehood as the father of lies imposed on our first parents when he said, concerning the eating of the forbidden fruit, "Ye shall not surely die!"

He that is born of God has thus far juster and deeper views of sin than others have, or than he himself formerly entertained. And while he is more careful in avoiding, and more successful in resisting it, his motives

in doing so are more spiritual and exalted. It is not from considerations of worldly prudence,—considerations as to his health, reputation, or temporal interest,—but from a regard to the law of his God, and from feeling that he is constrained by the love of Christ, that he seeks to depart from iniquity. Under this sweet and sacred influence, he lives not to himself, but to Him who died for us, and rose again. In this way, his repugnance to sin will be, not only decided and universal, but abiding. It will be felt, not only against all sin, but at all times, and under all circumstances. He is still conscious, indeed, of indwelling corruption; but if sin can never change its nature, neither can he change his. His heart is opposed to sin, and must be opposed to it for ever. Having once tasted “the glorious liberty of the children of God,” he is careful that he “be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.” He is not like some who, after a period of constrained abstinence, hasten to compensate themselves by a relapse into former indulgences, and who seem to think that even deeper excess may be permitted, or at least excused, on account of their temporary restraints and privations. On the contrary, he reckons himself “to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

But, in the second place, this self-denial and guardedness as to all sin, though an honourable distinction, is only a part of what distinguishes the new man. The Apostle tells that “whosoever doeth not righteousness, is not of God.” The habitual neglect of what the Divine law requires, though less noticeable or injurious to others, is, in the eye of God, as distinct a proof of disobedience as is the habitual commission of what it forbids. Now the man who is born again not only “abstains from all

appearance of evil," but is careful to maintain good works." He hungers and thirsts after righteousness. Encouraged by the gracious promises of Him whom he loves and serves, he seeks to cleanse himself "from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." Never found to profane the name of God, as little can he be charged with neglecting to worship Him in public, or to pour out his heart to Him in secret. He honours the Sabbath, regularly attends the ordinances of the sanctuary, and not less regularly attends to the religious interests of his household. "He walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart." For the sake of peace, he will sacrifice any thing but truth and duty. He does good to all men, as he has opportunity, especially unto them who are of the household of faith. He prayerfully strives to be "holy in all manner of conversation." He is not satisfied with the possession of a few attractive qualities, the performance of a few obvious and easy, though important duties, or the sacrifice of a few superfluous comforts and luxuries. And in fulfilling the weightier matters of the law, he does not satisfy himself either with the constant observance of a few, or with the temporary observance of all. He "gives all diligence to add to his faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly-kindness; and to brotherly-kindness, charity." He exercises himself "to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men." He rejoices if in any thing he can cause his light so to "shine before men, that they may see his good works, and glorify his Father who is in heaven." He feels that to that Father in heaven all the glory of his good works belongs; and

that after all that he has done, he is, and must ever continue to be, "an unprofitable servant." The sweetest, most beautiful, and most brilliant flowers, and the most luscious, luxuriant fruits, reflecting the richest hues, owe all their fragrance, beauty, and sweetness to the sun to whom they display their attractions. So it is with every one who walks "in the beauty of holiness,"—"adorning the doctrines of God our Saviour in all things." Those who are "called trees of righteousness," are, all of them, "the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified."

VIII.—*But, as the last evidence or Scripture mark of Regeneration, we may mention—Continuance and increase in the several graces already illustrated.*

No one of the graces which have been described in the preceding pages can really be possessed and exhibited by any but those who are born of God; and the undoubted possession and exhibition of any one of them will furnish indisputable evidence of the new birth. They may not all at once, or all alike, be brought into view; but the exercise and display of any one of them, if they do not amount to a direct demonstration of the existence in the same soul of all the other graces of the Spirit, demonstrate, at least, that that soul is a new creature,—that all the properties and endowments of the new creature belong to it,—and that it is now a soul in which all these graces will find a genial soil. The bright and steady flame of a single taper is sufficient to prove the purity and safety of the atmosphere around it. When we have the exhibition, however, not only of a single grace, but of several, and these not merely the most conspicuous in themselves, but held

forth and exercised under circumstances of peculiar difficulty and trial,—the conclusion becomes as irresistible as it is satisfactory, that the individual in whose soul they exist, and whose life they adorn, is a genuine child of God, and an heir of his kingdom. As the convergence of so many types, and the fulfilment of so many prophecies in the person and history of Jesus of Nazareth prove that He was the expected Messiah—the very Christ, so the union, in the heart and life of any individual, of those graces which are characteristic of his spiritual children, amount to a demonstration that such an individual ranks among the number. As the favourable symptoms are multiplied, the hopes and evidence of returning health are proportionally increased. Gradually, as circumstance after circumstance was evolved, the brethren of Joseph were brought to a full recognition of him as their own brother. He had at first, and during successive interviews, been unknown to them. The change of his appearance, of his dress, of his manner, of his voice, and of his language, prevented them from discovering in the man who was the governor over all the land of Egypt, the stripling whom they had once so unfeelingly sold for a slave. He had spoken to them roughly, and by an interpreter; he had intimated his suspicion that they were spies; he had treated them with apparent severity; he had taken occasion against them, even while granting them supplies, to detain one of them as a prisoner; and, in regard to their coming again for more, he had insisted on one of the most painful and perplexing conditions that could have been devised. Yet when, after all this, he could no longer refrain himself or master his feelings,—when he gave orders to be left alone with them,—when he wept aloud,—when he said to them, “I am Joseph; doth my father yet

live?" when he said to them, "Come near to me, I pray you,"—when he "fell first on his brother *Benjamin's* neck, and wept,"—and then, "moreover, kissed all his brethren, and wept upon them,"—they could doubt no longer, either as to his being their brother, or as to the generosity and affection which he expressed. In a similar way were the doubts and fears of their aged father overcome. "His fainting heart was revived," and Israel said, "It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive. I will go and see him before I die."

On the understanding that, not only some, but all of the evidences and Scripture marks which we have been examining, have been distinctly observed, and especially that their strength and distinctness have been progressively increased,—the conclusion as to the spiritual state of any individual may very safely be formed. Not unduly influenced either by sudden transports or by occasional yielding to peculiar temptations, but judging by the general tenor of a man's life, if it be found that the things of the Spirit, though accompanied with fewer fervours than at first, are really occupying more and more of his earnest regard,—then are we warranted to entertain the most favourable impressions concerning him. And, in regard to ourselves, if it be found that we have become more spiritually minded,—if it be found that our faith sustains us under temptations and trials under which it once used to waver or give way,—if it be found that our love of the brethren is more engrossed with the qualities which distinguish them as the children of God, and more devoted to the furtherance of their spiritual well-being,—if it be found that our humility has increased in the full proportion of all our Christian attainments and distinctions,—if it be found that we are less influenced by the fear or the favour of this present world,

and are living more under "the powers of the world to come,"—and if it be found that we are more and more following after holiness, and seeking to be holy even as He who has called us is holy,—then must the evidence of our spiritual or regenerate state become more conspicuous and conclusive. If these things be in us and abound, then have we an unquestionable and increasing evidence that we are the children of God, and that we shall at last be presented "holy, and unblameable, and unreprouable in his sight."

Our religious, like our other habits, are the surest tests, and the best confirmation, of those very principles on which they have been formed. If our principles are not constantly exercised and acted on, they not only languish but fall under the suspicion of being spurious or unsound. We cannot be stationary for any length of time, without inducing the apprehension that we have never yet entered the strait gate, and therefore are not advancing in the narrow way which leads to everlasting life. A gleam in the summer midnight sky may be mistaken for the dawning of morn; but when the day has fairly dawned, and the sun has actually risen, the possibility of mistake is at an end. The colour, the clustering, and the fragrance of the blossom may, to the experienced observer, convey a right impression that the graft or shoot on which it appears, is one from the approved stock; but even *he* will attach much more importance to the shape, size, and flavour of the ripened fruit. The fond parent who watches his child's first attempts at the formation of articulate sounds, will rejoice in this indication of the faculty of speech; but his joy will be fuller and his certainty greater, when he afterwards perceives that the little one begins to understand the meaning of the terms which it hears others

employ ; and when, at length, he hears these actually repeated by it, as the symbols and expressions of its infant thoughts. A youth may early exhibit signs of talent or of genius ; but his maintaining his ground and manifesting his superiority when brought into competition with others,—and still more, his striking out new light, opening new paths, mastering the attainments of his predecessors, and ascending to more splendid achievements of his own,—will evince the reality, and illustrate the character of his powers. The case is similar with respect to the children of God. In judging whether we be of the number, it must be more satisfactory to observe marks of steadiness and progress, than those which, at the most, are merely attributes of “babes in Christ.” The recollection of repeated instances in which our principles have carried us through trials, and sustained us in afflictions, must furnish better evidence of Christian character than any consciousness of what we suppose to be faith, but which has never yet been subjected to the fiery trials of actual experience. Our “abounding in the work of the Lord,” and being “workers together with Him,” assuredly present the fullest demonstration that we are “his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works.” As sons, we are servants to God. “We have our fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.”

CHAPTER V.

PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS.

WE have, in the preceding chapter, endeavoured to collect and illustrate the various evidences specified or alluded to in Scripture, of that all-important change which the soul must, in this life, undergo, in order to its enjoying the fellowship, and inheriting the kingdom of God. They appear to be the least ambiguous and the most complete that can be attained in the present mixed and imperfect state. The circumstances from which they are derived, seem to be as easily distinguished and ascertained as any that could be referred to. We have reason to be thankful that God has graciously furnished, to all who feel an interest in their spiritual state, so many means of forming a judgment respecting it. The great end and principal use of the preceding investigation, is to guide and help us in forming an estimate of ourselves. If it does not enable us to come to a positive decision, it may help us, at least, to discern on which side there is the greater amount of apposite and satisfactory evidence.

There can be little doubt but that, if any individual, after a thorough, impartial, and prayerful examination of himself, should clearly ascertain that he really possessed most or all of these evidences, and some of them perhaps in an eminent degree, he might, with humility,

indeed, yet with confidence, conclude that he was a child of God, and an heir of salvation. But then, on the other hand, it is, in the case of many persons, extremely difficult to discover whether they really possess these evidences or not. The nature of them is perfectly explicit; and they are just as decisive of the renewed state of the heart as the holiness of the uncorrupted Gospel itself is a decisive proof that it has not proceeded either from corruptible man, or from the powers of darkness. Did holiness,—the great leading feature in the souls of those who are renewed in the image of God,—exist in them as it does in the angels of light, as it does in the spirits of just men made perfect, or as it does in the Divine law and in the Holy Scriptures,—then no man could be at any loss to ascertain whether or not he had been born again. This, however, is not the case,—a circumstance which shows, indeed, that the possession of sinless perfection here, is not indispensable to convey to one the assurance of his being regenerate and in the way of salvation. But, to the attainment of this assurance, it is undoubtedly indispensable that he possess and manifest a decided and habitual relish for things pure, spiritual, and eternal. Amidst the varying, and sometimes conflicting experiences on which his judgment must needs be formed, it may often be no easy matter to determine even thus much concerning himself. There are instances in which evil has successfully insinuated itself into his mind,—instances in which he has fallen into sin, and in which Satan has been permitted to sift him as wheat. There have been seasons, too, of declension, and seasons, more or less protracted, of partial perplexity and desertion. He may be satisfied of the general truth that, notwithstanding many errors, failings, and even transgressions, a man may be in reality a child

of God ; but sin and delinquency, in whatever shape and under whatever circumstances, present always a solemn and alarming aspect to such an individual, and cannot fail to affect the evidence and impair the comfort which his general walk and conversation are fitted to afford.

The unfavourable impression which such experiences produce, and the degree of uneasiness which they occasion, will be the deeper and the greater, if the mind of the individual be naturally timid and easily depressed. A variety of outward circumstances, too, may contribute to the same effect. The distresses and disappointments of life—the endurance of pain—the departure of health—the saddening of the heart, from whatever cause—may sometimes be so closely the concomitants of particular shortcomings and offences, as to add, in no slight degree, to the painful anxieties which they awaken, with respect to his spiritual safety. Something of the same kind may be produced by the backsliding and apostacy of others, who had long, perhaps, maintained a high character among persons of seriousness and discrimination, and whom he had been accustomed to regard as much superior to himself, in every religious attainment.

But, on the other hand, should an individual be exempt from these particular sources of uneasiness and distrust—should he, without any unusual portion of self-complacency, possess a mind of a sanguine and animated cast—there might still be enough to make him pause and hesitate, when he came to sift the evidence of his spiritual state—when he came to test his principles, and to try himself anew, by those rigorous and scriptural rules of judging which we have already endeavoured to explain. Not even his constitutional cheerfulness and buoyancy, perhaps, could prevent him from feeling a damp come over him, and a wistfulness

take possession of his heart. That very hopefulness and elasticity of mind which had sustained him in every other case, if it did not utterly fail him in this, would be felt, at least, to be that against which he had chiefly and most solicitously to guard, because that which might precipitate him into a conclusion peculiarly replete with danger to his soul.

Independently, however, of either of these peculiarities of mental constitution, there must often be much difficulty in deciding as to our spiritual condition. The matter is so unspeakably momentous—a decision in our own favour seems to be so much akin to presumption, and, if erroneous, to be so much more dangerous than an opposite one could be, that, painful and disquieting as would be the alternative of uncertainty, it may appear preferable, on account both of its humility and its safety. Such feelings and reflections on the subject are not always quieted by a nearer and narrower examination of our case. Many of us have been very early formed, by education and habit, to the respect and observance of all that distinguishes the outward conduct and general manners of religious men. Whether, therefore, such persons have been regenerated or not, and whether their regeneration have taken place at an earlier or a later period, the evidence of it can scarcely be derived from a comparison of one part of their life with another. Nor is this the only difficulty that meets them. The affections of a regenerate man, though sanctified in part—though specially attracted by new properties and directed to new ends—are often placed on the same objects as formerly, and continue to have much in common with affections which are merely natural. A man may have partial and erroneous ideas of the attributes and government of God; and un-

warrantably presuming that the Divine favour has been extended to himself, he will naturally entertain what *he* regards as love to his benefactor. Although the feeling which he entertains, and which he honours with the name of "love to God," comes far short of what that name in Scripture implies, he can attach no higher idea to it than that which his own feeling conveys. The same liability to error, and the same defect of discrimination will, it is obvious, be found to exist as to all those affections which relate to our brethren of mankind—such as humanity, compassion, forgiveness of injuries, and brotherly love. This uncertainty whether his affections—though admitted to be of the class of the benevolent, and not wanting in strength—be yet sanctified or unsanctified in their nature, must necessarily produce a corresponding uncertainty as to the fact of his having been regenerated.

These remarks as to the difficulty of deciding on our own individual case, are illustrated in the history or the recorded experience of many good men and eminent servants of God, who have lived since the days of inspiration. In reading the language of their hearts, we are forced to acknowledge that the clearness of their evidence as to their personal state, and the degree of comfort which it afforded them, were by no means always in proportion to the holiness which they had attained. The following are sentences uttered, in his last illness, by one whose life had been much devoted to the service of God, and who had made many sacrifices and endured many privations, with every mark of Christian resignation. "I trust all will end well; but it is a dreadful conflict. I hope, I fear—I tremble, I pray.—I have not triumphant assurance, but something which is calm and satisfactory.—Oh! it is hard work.

Death is a new acquaintance: a terrible one, except as Christ giveth us the victory, and assurance of it. My flesh and my heart seem as if they *wanted* to fail and could not.—I *hope*, but I cannot but feel some *fear*; and it is such an eternal risk, of such infinite importance, that the slightest fear seems to counterbalance every prevalent hope.”

Here we see the lights and shadows—the various alternations of a Christian’s conflicts and consolations. But, to some extent, the experience even of some inspired men has been similar. In the case of the pious Psalmist, the vicissitudes of his public life seem to have been scarcely greater than the varieties of his religious experience. When he earnestly prays, “Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation,” it is evident that he had felt himself sorely bereft, if not of faith, yet, at least, of joy and peace in believing. He pathetically complains, at times, that his soul is in deep waters—that his feet were almost gone—that his steps had well nigh slipped—that he had been foolish and ignorant before God—and that his flesh and his heart are failing him. Even after communing with his own heart, and after his spirit’s having made diligent search, he put these affecting and anxious questions: “Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will He be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath He in anger shut up his tender mercies?” And it was not till after a season of reflection and reviving that he said, “This is my infirmity: but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High.” No doubt, these feelings of darkness and depression, under the afflictive dispensations of God’s providence, and the withholding of the light of his countenance, are not the same thing

as having misgivings with respect to his being in a state of *reconciliation* with God." "Many are the afflictions of the righteous." "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons." The blessed Saviour himself felt, at times, that his soul was "exceeding sorrowful even unto death." His human soul was all but overwhelmed with anguish and consternation. Under the hiding of his Father's countenance, and the infliction of his inconceivable wrath, terror took such hold on him that, for the time, he was, as it were, on the borders of despair. Yet his trust in God was finally and gloriously triumphant; and we dare not suppose that, at *any* moment, he had forgotten the Father's solemn and repeated declaration that he was his "only-begotten and well-beloved Son, in whom he was well pleased." But while all this is most true and precious, and while we are not to confound the sorrows and desolations which an anxious soul may feel, with doubts as to its own regenerate state, the one cannot fail to operate, in many instances, very seriously in creating and giving strength to the other.

It is important for us to think, not only of the possibility and the desirableness, but also of the difficulty, in many cases, of ascertaining that we have been born again. An inspired Apostle has exhorted us to "give all diligence to make our calling and election sure"—that is, to make ourselves sure concerning it, or to ascertain its reality. Another one has, on various occasions, expressed his doubts and anxieties as to the spiritual state even of some to whom he wrote as, by profession and external privileges, his Christian brethren. He has, moreover, admonished us to "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling," and that, too, under the

encouraging statement, that "it is God who worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure." This does not imply that we can do anything really pleasing in his sight before we are born again. We can take no part with Him in the work of sanctification, unless we have first been regenerated. The admonition is addressed to us on the supposition that we are already regenerate; but it reminds us that, without habitual reverence toward God, and without such fear of sin as implies the fear of offending, by disobeying Him, nothing can ever be done in accordance with the blessed work of the Saviour in the salvation of souls. It seems to be the intention of God that even his own children should sometimes be left in no small uncertainty respecting their present state and their ultimate salvation, and that they should sometimes have no more than good hope on the subject—the hope which is afforded by the increasing number of circumstances which testify in their favour. This state of things is, perhaps, the most subservient, in ordinary, to the cultivation and enlargement of their graces, and thus to the full attainment, and more perfect enjoyment, of that very inheritance of eternal life to which their present uncertainty relates. We are far from insinuating either that the fullest assurance of our personal salvation is not to be sought after and aimed at, or that it would diminish, if not destroy, our anxiety to live so as to please God; but undoubtedly we think that, if it were either indispensable, or eminently more conducive, to our perfecting holiness in the fear of God, it would more generally be vouchsafed, and more unequivocally manifested.

There is no question that it has been vouchsafed to many of God's inspired servants, both under the Gospel and under the previous dispensations. Many of these

servants, indeed, had to endure such afflictions and persecutions, that, unless for some peculiar consolation and support, they could not have "held fast the confidence and rejoicing of their hope, firm unto the end;" and the very faith which was adequate to endure such a fight of afflictions, was calculated to furnish to them the strongest consolation and the sweetest assurance of all further grace. This must still be the case; and where at least God sees meet to exercise any of his children with more than ordinary trials, we may believe that He will enable them to realize and to feel "that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope; and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us."

In this way, it is probable that, at the hour of death, true believers have often an increase of hope and of confidence, far beyond what they had ordinarily experienced. "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the latter end of that man is peace." If by assurance, indeed, is meant only a strong persuasion or confident hope, derived from a full but humble examination of the things which are for us and the things which are against us—then may it be esteemed a less rare and unusual attainment. "Great peace," says the Psalmist, "have they who love thy law." "The work of righteousness," says Isaiah, "shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever." There is "joy and peace in believing." "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace." This is what no one who is born again can fail generally to experience; but he may often have some anxiety lest the love, the joy, and the peace which *he* feels, be not really such as the Spirit imparts; or some anxiety lest these feelings, though

owned by the Spirit, should not exist in such a measure of purity and strength as to justify the assurance of his being sealed unto the day of complete and final redemption. It is with becoming humility that the advanced, as well as the recent believer, in professing his faith by saying, "Lord, I believe," should follow up the profession with the devout and earnest supplication, "Help thou mine unbelief." To feel assured that we are Christ's, must be an unspeakable comfort; but, in order to this, we must first believe, with all our heart, that He is able and willing to save the very chief of sinners, to save to the uttermost all who come unto God through Him—and that we ourselves have truly accepted of Him as all our salvation, and all our desire.

If the various circumstances to which we have now adverted are duly considered, it must be admitted that an examination with a view to ascertain whether or not we really have been born again, needs to be conducted with the greatest caution, fulness, and impartiality. Even with all these, it may often be very difficult to arrive at any certain conclusion—the very fear of error and the magnitude of the interests involved serving to increase the difficulty. A wrong decision, either for or against ourselves, may undoubtedly be followed by serious consequences. But let us think of the consequences of remaining undecided, or of the indifference and unconcern implied in postponing the inquiry, and still more, of disregarding it altogether? What would this imply? Would not this of itself amount, in substance, to a settlement of the question as to our spiritual state for the present? for surely such reckless unconcern could not consist with anything like newness of heart. Many as the doubts and difficulties of the serious inquirer may often be as to his having been regenerated—

doubts which may continue to embarrass him even after his regeneration has actually taken place—there can surely be no room for doubt when an individual is giving himself no uneasiness in the matter, but living without God—and fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind. A moment's reflection should convince any man that this is a fearful state in which to be, while a willingness to continue in it, is still more fearful. Apart from sinful indulgences and profligate habits, the very indifference which is manifested to the things which belong to our peace, when we know not how near we may be to death and judgment, implies as much infatuation as guilt.

It is not in this way that men ordinarily act in regard to temporal things, though much inferior in importance. A patient under fever, so far as he retains, or may recover the power of reflection, is no more indifferent than the friends around him to the crisis when it may reach its height, or when the issues from death may become hopeless. Those who have just succeeded in rescuing a friend from a watery grave do not satisfy themselves with ascertaining the important fact that, although many of the vital functions have ceased, life is not extinct. They do not wrap up the body in warm clothing, and leave it on the couch of repose, so assiduously prepared. They do not satisfy themselves with standing anxiously by, looking eagerly on the face, listening for the breath, or, as the pulse cannot be felt, applying their ear or the palm of the hand to ascertain the feeble throb of the great cistern of the heart. They know that, were this all that they did, the living man would soon cease to live. They expeditiously, skilfully, and perseveringly, make use of all appliances to assist and stimulate the suspended energies of nature, and cease not till they

see the final result,—the announcement of which, after such anxious efforts, is met by some of them with a convulsive sob, with a scream of delight, or with the rapture of silent tears. Did Lot find it safe for him to linger, or did the angels permit him to linger, in the doomed city of Sodom, when the fiery deluge was about to be rained on it out of heaven? Did the unfortunate manslayer disregard the nearest City of refuge, or forget that the avenger of blood would press on his footsteps in eager pursuit, and that he could never be safe till he got within the gate of the city? And is the life of the soul less precious, and, while we are indifferent to its welfare, less in danger than is, in the cases now specified, the life of the body? After what we have seen of the state of the soul as alienated from the life of God—of the absolute necessity of being regenerated, if we are ever to be admitted into his kingdom—and of the blessed and infallible agency which He has provided and revealed for this purpose, Oh! how awfully must our sin be aggravated if we do not seek, and seek *now*, to lay hold on eternal life! What excuse shall any of us be able at last to plead, if we are not feeling for ourselves, or for others, somewhat of the holy and peculiar solicitude which the Apostle Paul felt, when he thus addressed the Galatians? “My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you.”

CHAPTER VI.

THE TRANSITION FROM EARTHLY TO HEAVENLY THINGS, AND THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THEM.

JOHN III. 11-13.

IN order to illustrate the first subject of our Lord's conversation with Nicodemus, we have, in the preceding pages, treated successively of the Nature, the Necessity, the Author, and the Evidences of Regeneration. Endeavouring still to follow the train of that conversation, we shall, previously to the illustration of the other subjects, direct the reader's attention to our Lord's remarks as to the way in which his statements and reflections with regard to the first had been received by his interesting and inquiring visitor.

Our Lord had, first of all, stated the necessity of being born again, and specified or explained that this new birth was altogether of a spiritual nature, and accomplished by the special agency of the Holy Spirit. He then stated, in substance, that how incomprehensible soever to an inquirer might be the way and working of the Spirit in producing this change, there was nothing incredible in the doctrine which asserted the fact, and nothing more marvellous in the change itself than in some others, of the reality of which every careful or even casual observer must be persuaded. But, even after these statements, he had the mortification—if we may venture to say so—of hearing Nicodemus ask or

exclaim, "How can these things be?" The doctrine advanced by our Lord was neither unintelligible nor irrational. It was susceptible of illustration from the works of God. Nay, it was actually contained, in effect, in the writings of Moses and the Prophets,—the very writings with which this Ruler of the Jews might be supposed to be well acquainted. Had his language expressed merely the devout astonishment of a mind that felt itself incapable of comprehending the ways of Him who "is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working," then it had not been liable to challenge. But, while it betrayed such an ignorance of the Scriptures as made our Lord reply, "Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?" it also betrayed such an idle and perplexing curiosity about "things too high for us," as led away the mind from thinking of the importance of the change itself, and the necessity of seeking to obtain it.

Nor was this all. It betrayed a hesitancy with respect to the information communicated by the Person whose miracles had proved him to be "a Teacher come from God." We find, accordingly, that our Lord, after thus reproaching Nicodemus for not perceiving that the doctrine at which he marvelled was contained in, and borne out by the ancient Revelation, passes on to accuse him of a want of faith, as well as of understanding. He classes himself with the inspired penmen of the existing Scriptures, as all agreeing in their testimony, and as having all a perfect knowledge of the truths which they testify; and then solemnly says to him, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness." This language was more especially applicable, indeed, to Jesus himself than to any of the prophets. He had seen

and known the great change here referred to, in the case of every regenerate soul already in heaven, or still sojourning on the earth ; for, in the case of every one of them, the change had been produced by the gracious agency of his own Holy Spirit. Concerning every one of them, too, he could say, " My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." All those who are born of the Spirit, Christ will claim at last, and claims now, as his own children.

In all that the Prophets, Apostles, and faithful ministers of God have delivered and inculcated on this subject, they have spoken only what they have known, either by inspiration, by personal experience, or by the effects which they have seen produced in the case of others. In what Christ himself has communicated he has been guided by a still higher and more perfect knowledge. Nicodemus incurred a merited reproof for not receiving the testimony of this illustrious Teacher, notwithstanding that his doctrine was supported by Scripture, and confirmed by miracles which no man, it was confessed, could do, except God were with him. Now, the doctrine which was here preached to Nicodemus is still preached to us, and, though in a different way, by the very same Teacher ; so that, if we receive it not, it is actually His testimony which we question, and His reproof which we incur. If we are satisfied, as we profess to be, that this is " He who cometh from above, and is above all," then, to withhold our assent from any thing which He declares or communicates, is alike sinful and inconsistent. There is no risk of his declaring any thing which is contradictory or impossible, although our limited faculties may not be able to fathom, or to reconcile with one another, the various statements which he makes,—nor able to ascertain either what things are within the range

of possibility, or, being possible, by what precise means, or by what mode of agency, they come to be accomplished. By far the most important truths and facts in every man's creed, are such as completely baffle him fully to comprehend,—such, for instance, as the eternal existence and infinite perfections of God,—the union between the soul and body of man,—or the power which the will has over our different motions and actions. Now, the incomprehensible nature of the thing stated does not prevent the statement being intelligible, nor its being of the utmost importance, as the accurate announcement of a fact. Neither, surely, does it prevent its being made the subject of a Divine communication, or its being implicitly and cordially believed, when there is ample evidence and unimpeachable testimony that such is the statement, and that such is the fact.

The way, then, in which Nicodemus incurred reproof was simply this: He allowed the inexplicable nature of the fact to prevent his believing it—withstanding the unexceptionable testimony of the Person by whom it was distinctly asserted. Had he made the proper use of the doctrine which had been stated, as to the necessity of being born again, he would have shown a deep and unceasing concern that he himself might thus be born; and then his experimental knowledge of the reality of the change would have happily superseded his unprofitable inquiries about the secret machinery or agency of its accomplishment. He would have acted in the spirit of the man to whom Jesus imparted sight, and who, when interrogated as to the Author and the mode of obtaining it, simply replied, “One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see.” In point of fact, however, Nicodemus hesitated to admit the testimony of One who, in any statement that he made, was entitled to

implicit belief, because, in all statements as well as in the present, he proceeded on what he saw and knew. But his hesitation was the more inexcusable in the present case, because the change asserted to be necessary could be demonstrated to be so,—because it was analogous to other known changes among the works of God,—and because it had been substantially intimated in the existing and authentic record of Divine truth. And if he was so slow to comprehend or to admit the statements which had been made respecting such things as this, was it not likely that he would be still slower to admit, on the same authority, things which were totally beyond the reach of human discovery and device, and which man could never have thought of till they were revealed? His incredulity was likely to prove as detrimental to him as it was culpable in itself; for the degree of it which he had already shown, rendered it probable that he would not believe the loftier disclosures which were about to be made to him. He would thus shut himself out from all the instruction, benefit, and delight which they were calculated to afford. It was of this, accordingly, that he was immediately and solemnly warned by our Lord; and if the event was otherwise,—if he did ultimately believe the heavenly things which were told him,—it was just because the reproof and admonition now administered, were blessed to him for good. “If,” said Jesus, “I have told you of earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things?”

It may at first seem unaccountable that the things of which our Lord had been speaking to Nicodemus—the things connected with that spiritual change which has here been so fully considered—should thus be denominated “earthly.” Yet, in some respects, they really are

so. Compared with the more sublime and peculiar doctrines of the Gospel, which this Divine Teacher was about to unfold, they may, without disparagement, receive that humble designation. The things which appertain to the new birth are called earthly, because it is on earth alone that this change is produced, and there that many of its effects are exhibited,—because it admits of being illustrated by similitudes drawn from things which are of the earth,—and because the necessity of it, in order to the enjoyment of the Divine fellowship and favour, can be in some measure ascertained, and, at any rate, appreciated, by the exercise of natural reason. On the principle that God is perfectly holy, and that man, in his actual state by nature, is averse to the knowledge of God, impatient of the restraints of his law, and destitute of all fitness or relish for his communion, a thorough change in man's moral constitution is obviously indispensable to his true happiness, of which that communion must be not only an indispensable, but the principal element. It is not more obvious that man cannot taste of any enjoyment whatever, without capacities and desires adapted to those objects from which it is to be derived, than that he can never participate of the spiritual joys and exquisite felicities of the kingdom of God, without the entire renovation of all the capacities and desires which belong to him as a fallen creature.

The things, however, of which we now treat may also, as we have already hinted, be called earthly, on account of the peculiarly sublime and undiscoverable things which our Lord here denominates "heavenly," and with which he evidently intends to contrast them. What those things are to which he assigns the latter denomination, we readily learn from the sequel of his

statements, in which he speaks of his own essential Divinity,—his being the Only-begotten Son of God,—of his coming down from heaven, and appearing on earth as the Son of Man, though still continuing, even then, to be truly in heaven,—of his being appointed to be lifted up, referring to his death on the Cross out of love to a guilty world,—and of the certainty that eternal life and salvation through Him should be the inheritance of all who believed in his name. These are undoubtedly glorious and heavenly things. Although in no respects contrary to reason, or incompatible with the most enlarged and exalted ideas that we can form of the Divine nature and perfections, they so vastly transcend all the researches and discoveries of the human mind, that they never could have been suggested or imagined, even by the highest of created intelligences. For our knowledge of them, we are and must be indebted entirely to revelation. They are things of which no one could originally speak who was not, at least, a teacher sent from God ; and thus to speak of them was just one of the great ends of Christ's appearing in the world,—of God's being manifested in the flesh. They are matters exclusively heavenly in their origin and aspect ; and, in reference to those to whom they are published, they are purely matters of faith. Their truth rests entirely on the testimony of those who "knew the certainty of those things wherein they had been instructed," and the first of whom, in demonstration of their being entitled to credit and confidence, repeatedly appealed to the direct testimony of the Almighty and Eternal God, which was vouchsafed to them in the shape of indubitable miracles.

Now the testimony of witnesses, or of any single witness, thus accredited and accomplished, is abundantly

sufficient to justify, nay, to demand our faith in any doctrine, how marvellous soever it may be in itself. But if such be our incredulity that, even on the announcement and attestation of such witnesses, we scruple to admit the truth or possibility of some fact or circumstance which, though to us inexplicable, is not more so than many others which are forced on our notice and our belief, among "the things which are made,"—then, how shall it be thought that we shall cordially admit, on precisely the same authority, the truth of those things which are admitted to be without a parallel, as well as beyond the reach of human discovery or invention? This is a very solemn reflection. We have only to think what these higher doctrines of religion are, in order to perceive of what hope and consolation the rejection of them, through unbelief, would deprive us. This view of the subject appears to have been taken by Nicodemus, after it was suggested to him in the solemn and admonitory language of our Lord. The former seems to have felt at last what the latter stated, that none but One "from heaven" could originally reveal heavenly things; and, as we know that he afterwards not only spoke in defence of Jesus before the Sanhedrim, "being one of them," but that, after the crucifixion, he accompanied Joseph of Arimathea in obtaining, anointing, and burying the body of Jesus,—we may fairly conclude that he, like that other individual, had become "a disciple of Jesus," although, like him also, he had been one "secretly, for fear of the Jews." Those very doctrines which, in the sublimest sense, were entitled to be called Divine, having been brought home to his mind "in demonstration of the Spirit, and with power," had thus been the first to exer-

cise that faith which even a less amazing doctrine once seemed to him to preclude.

In those observations of our Lord on which we have now been commenting, he first complained—and the complaint was equivalent to a reproof—that Nicodemus had not received his testimony, though he had told him only of things which he had seen and known, and of things which were earthly and almost familiar. He then remarked on this unbelief, by directly insinuating that it was much more likely to prevent him from receiving his testimony, should he speak of heavenly things. But he had another observation to make,—one in which he stated, not only that he had yet to speak of heavenly things, but that none except himself *could* speak of them from personal knowledge. “And no man,” said he, “hath ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man, who is in heaven.”

By this observation, in so far as it was an admonition to Nicodemus, our Lord seems to have alluded more particularly to the reason why that individual, who had hesitated, if not refused, to receive his testimony respecting what he called earthly things, was still less likely to receive it when given respecting things which are heavenly. Considering the unbelief which you have already betrayed, how shall you believe, if I tell you of things which are entirely beyond the reach of all human discovery? These are things which, although they have been figuratively alluded to, and shadowed forth in the Scriptures, with which you have shown yourself to be but imperfectly acquainted, are in themselves completely beyond the province of human research. Doubting *my* accuracy and authority, how shall you believe these things at all? There is none to confirm my statements, or corroborate my information

respecting them,—no one, besides me, who can lay claim to a thorough acquaintance with the heavenly world. There is no one who, as an original inhabitant of the celestial mansions, has brought intelligence of their glorious secrets, or of the unsearchable counsels of the God-head, in reference to the destinies of man. There is no one who, even as an honoured visitant of these happy regions, has returned to this nether world with a solemn embassy from the Invisible God to his guilty creatures, with accredited and momentous tidings “of things pertaining to the kingdom of God.”

But, in the words of our Lord, there is something more than an allusion to the reason why Nicodemus was more likely to reject his heavenly than his previous communications. While our Lord thus reminds him that they could rest on no higher testimony than his own, he asserts, more solemnly than ever, that his own was most ample and infallible. While he reminds him that “no man hath ascended up to heaven,” or been instructed in its mysteries, he specifies one illustrious exception, and that is—himself. In reference chiefly to what he had advanced regarding the new-birth, he had already stated that all that he had spoken was what he had seen and known; and he now makes the same assertion, though in a much more striking manner, when he states that he had come down from heaven—nay, that heaven was his proper abode, and that, at the very moment of his saying so, he was “in heaven.” This was calculated to impress his visitor with the peculiar guilt of rejecting his testimony, for it represented it as the testimony, not only of one who, in the most solemn manner averred that he knew assuredly and thoroughly the truth of all that he was sent to declare, but of one who alone had the words of eternal life, and one who

was truly Divine. It was calculated to awaken his visitor's desire for heavenly knowledge, and to make him think of what he might possibly forfeit and forego, if he turned away, in scepticism and in the pride of earthly wisdom, from those communications which Jesus had to make. And, finally, it was calculated to point out to him, not only his guilt and folly, but also his inconsistency. It was, perhaps, an intentional allusion to the acknowledgment which he so early, spontaneously, and explicitly made, and on nothing less than the ground of miracles, that Jesus was a teacher invested with Divine authority. It was his conviction of this which made him seek to consult such a teacher for instruction; and a conviction which, instead of being shaken by the statement of a doctrine which, though in one sense mysterious, was obviously and necessarily true, ought to have prepared him to admit implicitly every intelligible and not self-contradictory doctrine which an instructor, thus accredited, was found unequivocally to announce.

The concluding observation which our Lord here addressed to Nicodemus, in reference to his unbelief, actually embodied in it some of those very doctrines—some of those higher and heavenly things—which rested entirely on the testimony which this individual had, in plainer matters, hesitated to receive. While Jesus set before him the unreasonableness, inconsistency, and guilt of his incredulity, he set forth also the great “mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh.” “And no man,” to repeat his statement, “hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man who is in heaven.” This act of gracious condescension on the part of our Lord in revealing the sublimest and most peculiar of his doctrines to a person who had been so far from rendering due honour to the

communications which He had already made to him, is almost as wonderful as that very love to which, among these doctrines, so conspicuous a place is assigned. It is a circumstance, at least, which was eminently calculated to interest his attention and engage his affections. We perceive our Lord, in this way, passing from his reflections respecting the manner and the spirit in which the first topic that He had introduced had been received by Nicodemus, to those loftier topics which related more immediately to the Author of our salvation—the love in which the plan of it originated—the means by which it is accomplished—and the way in which alone we can become partakers of its blessings.

In representing this thirteenth verse as being both a further reflection by our Lord with respect to his visitor's slowness to believe, and an *introduction* to the more sublime and marvellous doctrines by which larger demands were to be made on his belief, we are humbly persuaded that both of these things were before the mind of the speaker. On the supposition that the verse embodies both of these things, it will be perceived that the first of them takes off from the abruptness with which the other would appear to be introduced, if this were the only topic which the verse were alleged to contain. And yet, it must be confessed, that, even in this abruptness, there might be something peculiarly appropriate and significant. The announcement to Nicodemus of the sublime mystery of the incarnation might, with much propriety, be made in a way somewhat analogous to that in which the actual birth of the infant Messiah was originally made by the angel to the shepherds of Bethlehem, amidst the sudden splendour that burst forth from the midnight stillness of the skies.

Nicodemus had unhappily taken up the difficulties of

the doctrine of regeneration, as an abstract question. His faith was staggered and his mind perplexed. Our Lord, however, reassured him that the doctrine was true—asserted the infallibility of his own knowledge and testimony—and justly reprimanded him for suspending or withholding his belief. The great Teacher knew that there was a better way to rid the mind of these difficulties than by any statement of the doctrine, however clear—nay, than by any proof of its necessity, however strong. He knew that the most thorough conviction of this, if taken by itself, could be of no avail in leading any individual to seek or desire the change in question—just as the mere conviction that God has commanded us to be holy, does not hinder us from recklessly continuing in our sins. He presently began, therefore, to unfold a number of the most momentous and affecting truths, to which he had just alluded, under the title of heavenly things. These were truths with which the doctrine of the new birth could not but speedily connect itself, and from which it would, in consequence, derive much additional interest and importance. They were truths which, although in one sense surpassing all comprehension, were fitted to produce the deepest impression on an attentive mind, and to make the strongest appeal to the ordinary feelings of our nature. In reference to our Lord's statements concerning the new birth, the Jewish ruler had perplexed himself with the unprofitable question, "*How* can these things be?" but it was well known that, if once he should cordially believe such other things as those which the Divine teacher had yet to declare, all his metaphysical perplexities would vanish. Finding, by the plainest experience, that his views, affections, and desires had undergone a thorough revolution, he himself, in the certainty and

delight of this new state of mind, would then lose all his needless concern about the *way* in which it had been produced, and, still more completely, all his doubts as to its being practicable. For a long time, many, even among speculative men, were at a loss to understand how the earth, which presents everywhere to the eye of an ordinary observer the appearance of an uneven but boundless plain, should actually be an enormous ball, but the doubt, if not the amazement, was terminated, by the certain intelligence and the ascertained fact, that the navigator had sailed round it.

It is true that these latter doctrines referred to in our Lord's communications to Nicodemus, were much more astonishing than the first, and required to be supported by a much higher species of evidence. But then, they were fitted to be much more affecting to the human mind,—not only raising it to wonder, but filling it with veneration, overpowering it with gratitude, and melting it with love. We are perfectly aware that even these doctrines of themselves, in whatever way they come into contact with our feelings, cannot effect the renovation of the natural man. According to the views which have been given of the subject, in a former chapter, this change is always the immediate effect of the agency of the Holy Spirit. But, with all the subjects of his agency who are capable of having Divine truth addressed to them, it appears that he makes use of that truth in the renewing of their minds. Not that they can fully apprehend or cordially embrace the truth without his having *first*, though perhaps only *in the moment of addressing it*, enabled them, with more or less of earnestness and affection, to do so. But enough on this point.—Whatever might be the more immediate aim with which the doctrines here alluded to were announced to Nicodemus, we

know that they constitute the great leading and distinguishing truths of the Gospel revelation ; and that they “are able to make wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” To these truths themselves, therefore, let us now direct our most profound and reverent attention.

CHAPTER VII.

THE INCARNATION OF THE SON OF GOD—THE DIVINITY OF THE SON OF MAN.

JOHN III. 13.

THE incredulity, or slowness to believe, which Nicodemus had manifested, was such as justly to call forth, from our Lord, the language both of remonstrance and of reproof. He had hesitated to receive his testimony on a subject which, although momentous, and, in some respects, mysterious, was still to be ranked with earthly things. How, then, was he to accept his testimony in regard to things which were still more mysterious and sublime?—things which, in the highest sense, were in their nature heavenly? and what blessings might not be forfeited or foregone, if such things were discredited and undervalued? There was only one person who was fully informed and commissioned to speak of them; and that was just He whose communications Nicodemus had here betrayed such backwardness to welcome and embrace. In immediate connection, however, with the pointed reproof and warning which our Lord thus administered to his visitor, he graciously and solemnly called his attention to the first, and one of the most astonishing, of those heavenly things, or doctrines, which the very incredulity of that individual, if not overcome, would keep him from appreciating and embracing. He spoke of

Him that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man who is in heaven.

This title, "the Son of man," had been, both by the Psalmist and by Daniel the Prophet, applied, in a peculiar and emphatic sense to the Messiah.* That the person thus designated had not only come down from heaven, but that heaven had been his abode from everlasting ages,—or, in other words, that he was truly and essentially Divine,—is obvious, from the statement that, though he had come down to earth, and taken that humble name, along with the nature to which it belonged, he was still actually, though not yet bodily, in heaven. The same thing is obvious from a subsequent statement, in which he is expressly called "the only-begotten Son of God." It is obvious, also, from its being stated by the Evangelist, in his first chapter, that "the Word,"—which he had distinctly said "*was* God," as well as that it "was in the beginning *with* God,"—"was made flesh, and dwelt among us." To adopt the language of another Apostle, the Word thus incarnate, or personally united to the nature of man, was "God manifest in the flesh." These different Scriptures, especially when taken together, plainly demonstrate that, in the passage before us, the title "Son of God," is used, not in a vague and general sense, but in a sense the most strict and peculiar. The person here spoken of, as both the Son of God and the Son of Man, is represented, by himself, as being, at the same moment, both on earth and in heaven,—or, in other words, as possessing the Divine attribute of Omnipresence. Angels, it is true, and those who are lower than angels, are sometimes called "the sons of God;" but we never find ascribed to any created being one or more of the incommunicable

* Psal. lxxx. 17; Dan. vii. 13.

attributes of the Godhead. The passage before us, therefore, is as complete a proof of the Divinity of the Son of man as the passage which informs us that "the Father, when He bringeth in the First-begotten into the world, saith, And let all the angels of God worship him." The doctrine here asserted by our Lord was briefly this,—that He himself, the person who had come down from heaven, and who had been, by pre-eminence, styled the Son of man, was most truly man,—possessed not only of a human body, but also of a human soul, with all its essential properties, faculties, and affections, but all of them uncontaminated with sin; and that, even while he was, in this state, dwelling with men on the earth, he continued to be, as really as ever, present in heaven.

This is the sum of this grand article of revelation. It is part, and a leading part, of what the Apostle Paul designates the great mystery of Godliness. Our Lord gives it as a simple fact,—a most interesting and astonishing one indeed,—but, still, as a simple fact, of which he offers, and we can receive, no other explanation than that which it furnishes for itself. It implies that, being essentially, and therefore eternally and unchangeably God, he had taken the nature of man into the most intimate personal, though incomprehensible, union with his Godhead; and that, while, in both of these natures, he tabernacled with the children of the dust, he continued, in virtue of the unlimited character of the latter, to fill, as from eternity, heaven, even the heaven of heavens, with his presence and his glory. Though incapable of comprehending a union in all respects so truly and sublimely mysterious, we must be persuaded that, neither by it nor by any thing else, can the Divine nature be bounded, restricted, or impeded; and that the nature of man—that is to say, all that is *essential*

to his nature—must have remained equally entire, else the title of “the Son of Man” would have been altogether inapplicable to him who came down from heaven. The connection of these two natures in Christ, as here spoken of by himself, is evidently so peculiarly and inconceivably intimate, as to leave untouched the unity of his person ; and, as spoken of in other parts of the New Testament, it is as evidently incapable of being dissolved. At the same time, we are not allowed to imagine, for one moment, that they are, in the slightest degree, blended with each other. There is no confusion. They are perfectly distinct, though for ever inseparable. That which is Divine is nowise limited or encumbered by that which is human ; and that which is human, instead of being lost or absorbed in that which is Divine, has all its own powers, capacities, and sensibilities, quickened, invigorated, and elevated, in virtue of its union with the energies of the latter.

Having thus simply established the Scriptural fact of the mysterious and indissoluble union, in Christ’s person, of the Divine and human natures, and offered such explanations only as may serve to guard against misconception—we shall not presume to say a single word in illustration of this union. No one has any ground to allege that such a union is irrational or incredible ; that it is incompatible with the nature, or derogatory to the glory of God. It is enough that it is established by the incontestible evidence of the passages already quoted. Let it be observed, however, that these very passages represent the incarnation of the Son of God as having taken place only when He who was speaking with Nicodemus, came into the world—as something which had, indeed, subsisted in the counsels of the Godhead from all eternity, but which had been brought to pass

only at that late period in the history of providence, which has been denominated "the fulness of time." We are naturally led, therefore, to inquire what are the ends which this wonderful ordination was designed to accomplish or promote; and what are the motives which were acted on, when these ends were sought to be accomplished. Neither of these inquiries could be answered by the researches and speculations of human reason; and, although they are satisfactorily answered in that revelation from which all our knowledge of this doctrine itself is derived, we cannot enter on the consideration of these answers at present, without anticipating the very particulars which are set forth in the rest of the heavenly doctrines which our Lord, in this passage, has promulgated.

Without entering at large, however, on anything which is soon to come before us in its regular course and its proper place, yet, in here contemplating the glorious mystery unfolded in the doctrine of the incarnation, we are constrained to make a few obvious but indispensable reflections.

1. It is impossible, in the first place, not to feel that some great occasion must have existed to call for and explain so magnificent and unparalleled an appointment as the incarnation of the Son of God. The marvellous and mysterious nature of what is implied in that appointment, though no reason for refusing to admit the fact, must inevitably impress us with the conviction, that nothing less than this was necessary for the attainment of those ends to which it was to be subservient. Of the magnitude of these ends, nothing can give us a higher or juster idea than the fact which is here announced; and nothing could be better calculated to excite our eager attention to every further announcement that may

bear on the subject. We do not pretend to say whether it were likely to occur to Nicodemus that the incarnation of the Son of God was designed to be, in some way or other, subservient to the marvellous change of which he had already heard, under the appellation of the new birth; but, if this did occur to him, it could not fail to exhibit to him, in a most striking manner, the momentousness of such a change.

2. Another reflection which the doctrine now under consideration naturally suggests is this—that its Author is entitled, in this and in all things, to the most profound and implicit reverence. He who here states that the Son of man who came down from heaven, was, nevertheless and even then, in heaven still, intimates distinctly that He himself is that extraordinary individual. While he speaks of divine things, it is of himself that he speaks. He comes to reveal wonders, but himself and the style of his manifestation are the first and the greatest. Those to whom he has made his first communication may be riveted in astonishment at what they have heard; and they may be totally unable to imagine the purposes which all this is intended to serve. But this very communication tells them that He to whom they listen is actually God; and that if he shall add anything to what he has already uttered, it will still be with all the majesty of a voice which is divine. Now we ourselves are still in the predicament of such hearers. They are the very words of the Son of God to which we are here, and in what follows, called upon to listen. The grand outline of the scheme of redemption with which we are here presented, cannot be received at all, unless it be received as the express and unequivocal language of Him who is “God with us.” With what reverence and godly fear ought we to listen to

"the Lord from heaven!" And as often as we peruse and ponder the contents of these solemn sentences, how ought we to reflect that, though not now audibly spoken by him, they are still the words of One who is, at all times, present in all places of his dominion! The record from which we read not only refers to him, as truly as did the two tables of the law, which were written by his finger, and, for hundreds of years, overshadowed by his glory—but it never can be read by us, without his being so near as to be able to breathe on us and to say, if such is his gracious pleasure, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost."

3. A third reflection which the announcement of the doctrine of the incarnation suggests is this—that the highest honour has thus been conferred on the nature of man. The mere announcement of the fact would not enable us to form any conception of the specific object which the Godhead had in view, in so unparalleled an exhibition. But the simple circumstance that the exhibition has been made in the nature of man—not in his fallen condition, indeed, but in the *nature* of man who is fallen—is sufficient to intimate something peculiarly gracious towards those who once were created in the image of God. Had the Godhead been revealed only for the purpose of executing judgment and inflicting vengeance on an apostate and rebellious race, the revelation, we may safely presume, would have been made in any way rather than by assuming the nature of those who had been living in rebellion. God would have stood forth, arrayed, as at the giving of the law, in his own "terrible majesty." But it was "in the likeness of man" that He actually appeared; and his gracious "words were to the children of men." It was an honour to the Israelites, that, during their journey-

ings in the wilderness, God stationed the symbol of his presence at the head of their encampment, and that He afterwards manifested his glory in the midst of them. And well might Solomon, when he prayed that this glory might fill the temple, exclaim, "But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth!" Yet how much superior to all this was the honour conferred on man, by God being manifest in the flesh? by the incarnation of Him who thus became "the image of the invisible God?" In "the man Christ Jesus," "dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." The Godhead thus seemed to be inviting mankind, in the most condescending and endearing manner, to approach it. While God emphatically demonstrated that with him no evil can dwell, He showed how glorious a habitation He could construct for himself, in that human nature which guilt alone had dishonoured and defiled.

God has thus bestowed on the nature of man a higher and more peculiar honour than on any other class of his intelligent creatures. By the Son of God becoming a partaker of that nature, He has condescended to connect himself with our race, in a way altogether unparalleled. He has entered into personal union with his own workmanship. "He took not hold of angels" to save them; "but of the seed of Abraham he took hold"—for this purpose becoming "a partaker of flesh and blood." Of all the structures of the visible universe, the most glorious, in reality, though not to the eye of sense, was the marvellous masterpiece of Divine wisdom and power in the constitution of the person of Emmanuel—the indestructible temple of his body, animated by a holy human soul, the object of the Father's unqualified delight, and both of them united, in the person of the Son, to "his eternal power and Godhead." Never was there

such a temple for the inhabitation of his glory? The material universe, in all its radiant magnificence, was not to be compared to it. The cloud of glory—the symbol of the Divine presence in that temple which, planned by God and built by Solomon, was justly styled “the perfection of beauty,” “the joy of the whole earth”—may be said to have “had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth.” And, now especially that He has passed through his state of humiliation, and been exalted, as God in our nature, to the glory which, as the eternal Son, He had with the Father before the world was—how surpassingly glorious must He be, even as an object of beatific vision, “when He shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe, in that day.”

What a glorious revelation is here presented to us of the Divine perfections and character! That there is *mercy* with God, was graciously intimated to man, soon after the Fall. Though banished from Paradise, he had not to enter on his pilgrimage as an exile, without the hope of Divine protection and mercy. The sin of man, aggravated and audacious as it was, was yet, in the gracious purposes of Divine wisdom, made the occasion of opening up to him, and to other created intelligences, one of the most glorious attributes of the Godhead. The existence, indeed, of mercy might have been intimated, even before any case had arisen to admit of its manifestation in exercise; but it may be doubted whether, in such circumstances, its nature could have been fully understood. At all events, the glory resulting from it to the character of God, could not have been illustrated and recognised so as it now “shines in the face of Jesus Christ.” As thus contemplated, we may venture to say of the last revealed of the Divine

attributes, that if not the most glorious, where all are infinitely so,—it is that which enhances the glory of all the rest, and especially of those which, till exhibited in harmonious co-operation, appeared to be especially opposed to it. But now is proclaimed, and now are we encouraged to embrace, the blessed truth, that the God to whom vengeance belongeth is the same God who delighteth in mercy!

4. But there is a fourth reflection which presents itself to us, when contemplating the great mystery of the Incarnation,—the sublime exhibition of moral character which the Son of Man was fitted and appointed to make. To a reflecting mind which knew nothing more than the mere fact, that in this illustrious person the Divine and human natures were combined, it could not fail to occur that, living in a world such as this, the very purity of his human soul must have subjected him to suffering and to sorrow. It was obvious that his righteous spirit must have been “vexed from day to day, with the filthy conversation of the wicked, and with their unlawful deeds.” There was none of their wickedness that could be hid from him; and there was none of it to the guilt of which he was not thoroughly and painfully alive. The whole amount of what he could not fail to suffer in this way must evidently have exceeded all computation. In addition to this, however, being, as man, subject to many personal infirmities, distresses, and apprehensions,—to many privations, bereavements, and sorrows,—it followed that the very Divinity, by the energy of which he was enabled to sustain them, made him see and taste them before-hand in all their inherent and unmitigated bitterness. It must have made him feel their poignancy the more deeply, by realizing at every instant that from which

they derived both their origin and their strength—the sin of an apostate world, and the wrath of that God in whose sight sin is an utter abomination.

Nor could the effects of the mysterious union of natures in Christ be less conspicuous in his virtues than in his mere endurances,—in the way in which he suffered, than in the number and extent of his sufferings. In taking upon him the nature of man, it was obvious that he must have taken upon him a sense of accountability,—or, in other words, that though essentially One with the Lawgiver, he must have been “made under the law,” and “numbered with the transgressors.” And, Oh, what a spotless example of holiness must he have exhibited! Yet all that could come under the eye of human observation was unspeakably the smallest part of that which actually constituted his character. The fairest specimens of regenerate humanity—the purest of the saints on earth—have all of them their blemishes. The leading tendencies of their souls are toward God, and they delight in his law “after the inward man.” But, alas! when they would do good, evil is present with them. They may often be found mourning over their besetting sins and their secret faults, even while others are speaking of them in admiration, and regarding them as next to immaculate. In the bosom of the Son of Man, on the contrary, every thing must have been in perfect unison with the Divine mind. The very act of his coming down from heaven was sufficient to demonstrate the disinterestedness of his kindness to the children of men; for he was possessed of a glory to the splendour of which nothing could be added, and of a felicity the purity and fulness of which were incapable of increase. His self-denial was of the most exalted character. In his case, there was no apparent sacrifice

with a view to speedy and temporal advantage. He did not come prepared with the purchase-money—the present price—of applause, or with the dexterous policy which the men of this world are ready to employ. His devotion was not, and could not be, that which kindled and cooled, according to the outward dealings and dispensations of Providence. His love to the Father could not be like the emotions of those who sometimes express their attachment to their earthly parents by a paroxysm of grief, in the prospect of separation, and who yet, when spared the pang which they apprehended, may soon after betray themselves by a sullen disobedience to parental authority, or by a heartless indifference to parental feelings. It was a love which was attracted, and at all times *equally* attracted, by the adorable perfections of the Father's character,—perfections which belonged alike to the Father and to Himself. With whatever views of pity and of kindness toward man he had entered this earthly abode, they could never but be subordinate to the glory and majesty of God. In the vindication and promotion of these, the whole faculties of his soul were habitually engrossed. His whole moral conduct as man was in reality a glorious personification of the moral perfections of the Godhead. In the firmament of moral existence he shone in surpassing effulgence as “the Lord our Righteousness.”

And, in concluding these reflections, we must not overlook the sublime devotion of his secret and special communion with the Father. Though he had no sins to confess, and no forgiveness to implore, he had trials to endure, and sorrows to make known; he had anxieties to feel, desires to express, and thanksgivings to offer. Under what a profound sense of the evil of those sins which he came to expiate—what an affecting sense

of the Divine presence—what a deep feeling of the necessity of Divine aid—and what an exquisite delight in the assurance of the Divine favour—must he have drawn near in prayer to his Heavenly Father! And this was the Being who was “bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh!” Oh, what an honour, what a mystery to man! But we can dwell no longer on reflections of our own. We wish to hear more from himself, for this is only the beginning of wonders. We wish to hear what God had in view, in this marvellous appointment of his own Son, the brightness of his glory, to “take upon him the form of a servant, and be made in the likeness of men.” We wish to hear how it is connected with the present interests, and the eternal prospects of those of whose nature he thus became a partaker.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LIFTING UP OR DEATH OF THE SON OF MAN.

JOHN III. 14, 15.

THE first of the heavenly things which Jesus had to communicate to Nicodemus, was that which we have been considering in the preceding chapter,—the Incarnation of the Son of God,—the Divinity of the Son of Man. The announcement of this doctrine was speedily followed by another, in which he intimated the Necessity of his being “lifted up,” or “put to death in the flesh.” “And as Moses,” said he, “lifted up the Serpent in the Wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up.”

The circumstance here alluded to in the history of the Israelites must have been perfectly familiar to the mind of Nicodemus, even if, instead of being a ruler, he had been only one of the common people. When the Israelites had spent nearly forty years in the Wilderness, and were once more within a moderate distance of the promised land,—instead of being permitted to pass into it directly, a Divine command was issued which laid them under the necessity of journeying again by the way of the Red Sea, and compassing the land of Edom. “The soul of the people,” we are then told, “was much discouraged because of the way.” They relapsed into their ancient murmuring and rebellion; and “spake against God and against Moses.” To punish them for their

impiety, God sent fiery serpents among them ; and they bit them, so that " much people of Israel died." In this miserable condition, they applied to Moses, and having confessed their sin, besought him to pray unto the Lord that He would " take away the serpents from them." Moses accordingly prayed for the people. It is not stated whether the serpents were immediately removed, so that no more of the people were bitten ; but the Lord gave such directions to his servant as pointed out the means, or gave the pledge of a certain cure to all who had been, or who might be bitten. He commanded him to make a serpent of brass, in colour, perhaps, as well as in shape and proportions, resembling the reptiles whose bite occasioned pain so intolerable, and which invariably led to effects so fatal. This figure the Lord instructed him to place on a pole, elevated in the sight of the whole encampment, and assured him that if any one who was bitten looked on it he should live.

Such was the purpose for which, by Divine authority, Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness ; and, (himself the sacred historian,) he has recorded the fact that that purpose was completely attained, in every case where the sufferer looked with an eye of faith toward the appointed symbol. In the symbol itself, there was no natural fitness to produce such a cure ; but the immediate interposition of the Divine will being to this effect, whosoever complied with the prescription given by Jehovah, was certainly, if not instantly healed.

Now, it was from the incident, or transaction, described in the Scripture narrative, that our Lord took the similitude under which he introduced the second of those heavenly things, or doctrines, to which he called the attention of Nicodemus. The Son of man, he said, must, in this way, be lifted up. The manner of his being

lifted up was to be similar ; it was appointed with a view to a similar cure ; and its necessity in order to the attainment of that end was equally absolute.

As to the import of the phrase here used, in reference to the Son of man, all that it describes is simply the circumstance that he was to be "lifted up," or elevated. But Jesus, in using it on other occasions, and in reference to a particular event, leaves us no room to doubt as to that to which he here immediately refers. In the eighth chapter of this Gospel, we find him saying to the Jews, in allusion to his *death*, as the context evidently shows, "When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am He." And again, in the twelfth chapter, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." "This," observes the Evangelist, "he said, signifying what *death* he should die." In other words, it was an allusion to his dying on the *Cross*, being raised up when affixed to the accursed tree, and exhibited there, in a state of suspension between earth and heaven.

This point being settled, it may well appear wonderful that a person such as Jesus had described himself to be, should have come into the world under an ordination to suffer death. All power in heaven and on earth was given to him. By him all things were made, and by him they all consist. He was, in every sense, "the life of the world," and "the Prince of life." Yet he came to be crucified, and "to give his life a ransom for many." It is probable that the language which Jesus here employed in alluding to his death, did not at once convey a distinct idea to the mind of Nicodemus. But the Son of man's being lifted up *as the serpent was*, and that, too, for the purpose of exempting from suffering and death, might have led him to perceive, that such

language referred to something else than *exaltation*. This might the more readily be perceived, in connection with what the Scriptures had foretold respecting the piercing of the hands and the feet of the Messiah, and respecting his being "wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities." At all events, whatever idea Nicodemus might attach to this lifting up of the Son of man, the allusion which was made to the transaction in the wilderness gave him plainly to understand, that it was intended to be subservient to the healing of those who were under disease, and to the preservation of those who were ready to perish. Nor was this left to him as a mere matter of inference. He was distinctly informed, in the very next sentence which Jesus uttered, what was the precise and special object for which the lifting up of the Son of man was ordained.

But, not to dwell longer on the purpose of this lifting up—which will thus come again under fuller and more immediate consideration—let us attend to the last point of resemblance, to which we have adverted, between the lifting up of the Son of man and the lifting up of the Serpent—namely, its *necessity*. The points of resemblance between these two cases are too numerous to be looked on as incidental. Our Lord evidently referred to the case of the Brazen Serpent, not merely as an incident in Jewish history, which furnished him with an appropriate illustration of a doctrinal statement. He referred to it as one which served so specially, and in so many points, to illustrate the wondrous event which he had intimated regarding himself, because of that event it had been divinely constituted to be a most express and appropriate *type*. In none of the points of resemblance is the significance of the type more striking than in the indispensable necessity of the expedient, on the one hand, and

the predicted death on the other. That necessity is affirmed and established by the plainest and briefest terms that could be employed. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so *must* the Son of man be lifted up." But let us examine more particularly in what that necessity consisted,—in what sense, and in what respects, the lifting up of the Son of man, or the death of Christ on the Cross, was declared to be necessary.

It could not have been *necessary*, in any such sense as implied that the Holy and Righteous God might not, without any impeachment of his character, or any thing inconsistent with his infinite and glorious perfections, have left sinners of mankind, as He has left the fallen angels, to perish under the just though terrible consequences which his righteous and unchangeable law has denounced against its transgressors. He could not be under any obligation, so far as concerned what was due either to his own attributes or to his rebellious creatures, to interpose on their behalf, and, in some way or other, as might seem good to Him, but in some way for *certain*, to bring and offer them redemption. Any such necessity as this, for setting forth his Son to be a propitiation, and for his being delivered up for us all, would be altogether opposed to the solemn and emphatic representation of his most holy Word, which so expressly ascribes the whole plan of salvation "to the good pleasure of his will." Even in taking vengeance, God is bound by the very perfections of his own nature, not to overlook or exceed the demands of justice. No act of transgression and disobedience, however audacious, can, under his righteous government, receive more than its just "recompence of reward." Hence the confident appeal implied in the question of Abraham, when he was

pleading in regard to Sodom,—“Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” Mercy, it is true, is that which we are now warranted to regard as, not less truly than justice, one of the ‘inalienable attributes of God. There is, however, this important difference between them, that He cannot but, in every case, exercise the latter, while the exercise of the former, in any case, is a matter of absolute and gracious sovereignty. It was entirely a matter of his good pleasure, that man was ever created; and when, by violating the commandment and insulting the majesty of God, he had forfeited life and incurred the just and heavy displeasure of Him who gave it, surely it was, at least, as much a matter of sovereign mercy that he was not consumed, or left for ever under the dreadful consequences of his impious rebellion. What reason have we to rejoice, and what a glorious exhibition does it afford of the Divine character and counsels, when we find that the respite of life was vouchsafed, and the intimation of future offspring to the first transgressors was given, in significant and immediate connection with the promise and provision of a mighty yet suffering Saviour!

Now, it was only in reference to the *purpose of salvation*, thus early announced, that either the appearing on earth, or the lifting up of the Son of Man could be said to be necessary. To allege that it was necessary in the same way, and for the same reasons that it is necessary for God to be just, would be in direct opposition to the solemn and repeated statements contained in the writings of the Apostles, and very specially in the very next verse of the passage before us, as to the love—the compassionate and benevolent love—in which the whole of this wondrous purpose had its origin. The lifting up of the Son of man was necessary only as following out,

and in the execution of, that glorious plan which God, in the exercise of sovereign grace, had, from all eternity, entertained and prepared for seeking and saving that which is lost. This is a species of necessity which is not without some counterparts even in the ordinary works and providential economy of God. It was not necessary, for instance, that, in creating living things, He should replenish at once the earth, the air, and the ocean. We find that, in point of fact, this was not done. The Sacred record informs us that He commanded the *waters* to bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and then the fowl that might fly in the open firmament of heaven, before—and it does not here signify how long, or how shortly before—He issued a similar command as to the beast, the cattle, and the creeping thing that were to inhabit the dry land. But, come into being at what time soever the Creator pleased, it was *necessary* that their organs should be adapted to their instincts, and both of these to the element or elements in which they were to move and to reside. It was, in like manner, not absolutely and in itself necessary that, in the planetary system to which we belong, there should have been two planets moving round the sun, nearer to him than our globe; but being appointed to occupy that position, it *was* necessary, according to the laws by which the Creator himself regulates their motions, that their velocity should be greater and the periods of their revolutions shorter than any of the remoter planets. Again, had it been his pleasure, we might, on this earth, have had the regular alternations of day and night, but these of exactly the same length throughout the entire year. In that case, we could not have had that beautiful and beneficial vicissitude of the seasons which we now enjoy. Light and heat would not have

been so equally distributed to the different regions of the globe as they now are. But then, let us observe that, in order to secure to us these advantages and enjoyments, it was necessary, that our globe, in its daily and its annual revolutions, should occupy some such inclined position to the sun as that which has been assigned to it.

Turning to another department, it manifestly was not necessary that always, as well as during the ages before the Flood, the life of man should be prolonged for several hundreds of years ; but so long as that state of things existed, it was certainly necessary that the vigour of his constitution should be sustained and continued, so as to fit him for the duties and enterprises of that remarkable period in the history of the human race. It was not necessary, nor is it yet, that every man should be profoundly acquainted either with the investigations or with the discoveries of science ; but the purpose which God has undeniably entertained, that such discoveries should be made, plainly involved the necessity that the means of accurate and extended observation should be within the reach of man, and that he should be endowed with faculties which, highly cultivated, and rightly and strenuously applied, were adequate to the achievement of such splendid and important results. It was not in itself necessary that man should, even in his now fallen state, possess such an extensive dominion as he exercises, not only over the lower animals, but also over inanimate nature, but, for the exercise and maintenance of this prerogative, it was, beyond all question, necessary that God should "teach us more than the beasts of the earth, and make us wiser than the fowls of heaven." There is, in short, a necessity, in many cases arising out of circumstances which are not themselves necessary ; and of this

kind was the necessity which existed for the Son of man's being lifted up.

The lifting up of the Son of man was necessary because God had graciously determined to save sinners, and, in the exercise of his sovereign grace, *in this manner* alone to save them. That such a determination existed, was evinced by many express intimations in the ancient Scriptures, and especially by those predictions which related to the sufferings and sacrifice of this very person,—predictions which are given with a fulness and minuteness resembling, at times, the actual delineations of history. To us it seems almost impossible to peruse those ancient Scriptures, without perceiving how they abound in typical and prophetic intimations of the Messiah's sufferings; and, had it not been for the highly poetical and splendid intimations which relate to him in another point of view, that is, in his *kingly* character, the Jewish people would have been less startled and offended with the lowly Jesus,—with a suffering Messiah,—with “Christ crucified.” When he began, and continued, from time to time, “to show unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders, and chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day,—he showed them nothing but what was perfectly accordant with all that the Scriptures had already stated respecting the Christ. We find, accordingly, that, after his resurrection, when he conversed with the two disciples by the way, “and expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself,” he did this in the confidence that he should hereby establish the doctrine to which he pointed and appealed, when he said, “Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?” And when the Apostle Paul undertook, before the Jews of

Thessalonica, to establish the same point, "he reasoned with them out of the Scriptures, opening and alleging, that the Christ must needs have suffered."

Now, the death of the Messiah was necessary, not because it had thus been predicted, but because, as the predictions themselves implied, that event had been fixed on in the counsels of the Godhead. It is imperatively required, no doubt, that the Divine foreknowledge should be seen to be infallible,—that the Divine word should never be pledged in vain,—and that the Divine consistency should invariably be maintained. It is necessary, in other words, that every prediction proceeding from God should harmonize with, and be justified and fulfilled by, the event. But then, the necessity of the event does not arise from the existence or publication of the prediction ; nor is it, strictly speaking, on account of this that the event must needs be brought about, but on account of that previous and unchangeable purpose of which the prediction is merely the announcement. The prediction is just such a disclosure of his purpose as God sees meet to communicate to his creatures, whose interest it serves to awaken, and whose faith it is intended to exercise. The event comes at last as a full exposition both of the purpose and of the prophecy, and must necessarily accord with both ; for the only Being who could originally intimate the event is He who had planned and ordained it, and who had the unquestionable power of bringing it to pass. The lifting up of the Son of man was necessary, however, not only because it had been determined on in the counsels of infinite wisdom, but because, in this determination, it was ordained to be subservient and indispensable to another and more comprehensive object,—namely, that of extending redemption to sinners of the human race, and thus of signally

manifesting the glory of God, and of destroying the works of the Devil. This great object was intimated along with the very first prediction concerning the Saviour, in which it was declared that the Seed of the Woman should bruise the head of the Serpent. It was to this promised Saviour that all the types and sacrifices under the Mosaic dispensation expressly referred; and it was from Him that they received all their significance and value. In these things themselves, there was no more value or efficacy to expiate sin than there was in the exhibition of a serpent of brass to remove the pain, or prevent the fatal effects of the fiery serpents' envenomed bite. "It was not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins." At the same time, it is stated in the epistle from which these words are quoted, that, under that dispensation, "almost all things were purged by blood; and that, without shedding of blood, there was no remission." All this was intended to point out the necessity which there was for the shedding of the blood of "the Lamb of God," "who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest," says the Apostle, "in these last times for you."

We are told, in like manner, that into the second or inner tabernacle, which was called the Holiest of all, or the Holy of Holies, none but the High Priest entered, and he only once every year, and then "not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people." And as that blood was typical of the blood of Christ, this circumstance was intended to signify that since sinners, as such, are "enemies in their minds against God, by wicked works," they can be reconciled, and "made nigh to Him only by the blood of Christ." Through Christ alone can they have access unto

the Father. We have it, too, on the authority of another Apostle, that Jesus Christ of Nazareth is not only a Prince and a Saviour, but that "there is not salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." And both these inspired authors have expressly stated that it is through his blood that he saves us. Had it not been for his sufferings, he could not have been fully qualified to accomplish our salvation. "For it became Him for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." "Christ hath once suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust, that he might bring us unto God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit."

Now, be it observed, we are not called upon to explain *how* the death of Christ should expiate sin, or *how* the mercy of God to sinners should be exercised only through the medium of his righteousness and death. It is not requisite to enter into the reasons why, in accomplishing their salvation, God was pleased to ordain that the Son of his love should, in the likeness of sinful flesh, "taste death for every man," or why any one, in the character of a substitute, should taste death at all. It is not requisite to enter into these, any more than it is to enter into the reasons why God was pleased to entertain a purpose of saving sinners in any way. It is quite sufficient for us thus to have shown, from the acknowledged and authentic records of his own will, that such *is*, and has been his purpose; and such the particular method which He has adopted for carrying it into effect. This is quite enough to constitute and explain the necessity of Christ's being lifted up, and put to death on the Cross. It pleased God, in the exer-

cise of his sovereignty, to form a plan for the salvation of sinners, whatever the number or the inveteracy of their sins; and in the execution of this plan, Jesus Christ, partaking of His nature and of theirs, is constituted "the one Mediator between God and man."

It is probable that what has now been said respecting the necessity of the Messiah's death was all that was meant to be directly asserted in the language of the passage now under consideration. His death was necessary in reference to the "determinate counsel" of Him by whom it was appointed. It may be quite true, however, at the same time, that there was a *further* necessity in the case. Granting, what is unequivocally asserted in various passages of Scripture, that God had, from all eternity, entertained a gracious purpose of extending mercy to sinners of the human race, it is surely no reflection on the infinite resources of his wisdom, or the unlimited capabilities of his omnipotence, to say, that this purpose could be executed only in a way which was consistent with all the Divine perfections,—with the honour of the Divine character, and the permanent interests of the Divine government. As to what is required for the maintenance of all these, we are, indeed, very incompetent judges. But He has not failed to reveal himself on this very subject. The Apostle solemnly tells us that God, having out of his mere good pleasure resolved to exercise forgiveness toward sinners,—forgiveness alike unexpected and undeserved,—had also resolved to exhibit to them and all his intelligent offspring, a most striking demonstration of his holiness and justice. In this way, God has connected together the pardon of sinners with the punishment of sin, the support of his authority and the vindication of his righteousness. They are "justified freely

by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, *to declare his righteousness* for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; that He might be just, and the justifier of him who believeth in Jesus." In these words, it seems to be distinctly intimated that the very perfections of the Godhead involved the necessity of an *expiation* for the guilty, in order that they might not be visited with the whole weight of punishment due to their guilt. This is, in substance, the same that was intimated in that ancient and sublime proclamation of his character, which He made to Moses at the renewing of the two tables of stone, on which with his own finger the Ten Commandments were written: "And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty,"—that is to say, obviously,—without an atonement for their guilt.

There was, then, a moral necessity that, if the sinner was to be pardoned, there should be an atonement for his sin. Was there a *similar* necessity that the atonement should be made in the person of God's own Son? Did the necessity of *his* suffering arise merely from his being *appointed* to suffer? or was the appointment *itself* indispensably necessary, in following out the Divine purpose of redeeming love? The Scriptures seem to justify the belief that it was. There is something in the mere fact of his appointment to the office of Mediator, which seems to intimate that He alone, and none but He, was qualified to fill it; for it is scarcely supposable that such an appointment would have taken place,

had there been any individual of the rank of a mere creature, however highly exalted, capable of executing that office in all its parts. Among the highest orders of created beings, there were many of princely dignity, of untarnished innocence, and of ardent devotedness to the service of their Creator. Such were "his angels that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word." But, so far were even these from being deemed adequate to the stupendous undertaking of redemption, that the mysteries of this undertaking, and, in particular, the sufferings of the Divine Redeemer, continue to be the subject of their adoring wonder and devout investigation,—the things into which they desire to look. From the vision of the Apostle John, we learn that the sealed volume of God's future providence was what "no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open, to read, or to look upon;" but "the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof." All this knowledge and power is indispensable in One to whom, as Mediator, it belongs to be "Head over all things to the Church; and all those, therefore, who were destitute of this,—that is to say, all created intelligences, were incapable of being appointed to that illustrious and unparalleled office.

Nor was this all. In order that they might execute the office of Mediator, it was not enough that they were absolutely innocent. They must be able to *maintain* their innocence; and since the expiation which Justice demanded needed to be made in the nature of those who had sinned, it was necessary that, even when invested with the sinless infirmities of that nature, they should be able to maintain their sinless character, whatever were the nature, the number, or the strength of the tempta-

tions by which, on the part of the powers of darkness, they might, at any time, be assailed. Supposing an individual of their exalted order had been appointed to the Mediatorship; then, though he excelled in strength, this would not signify, unless such were his pre-eminence, and such the resources and energies which he possessed, that he could successfully withstand all the assaults to which he might be exposed. He must be able to defeat the machinations, destroy the works, and put an end to the dominion of the Apostate angel and his proud compeers, who had ruined and led captive, at his pleasure, the soul of once holy but now unholy and wretched man! He must be able to disarm and vanquish death, triumph over the grave, and show that the gates of hell could not prevail against him. He must be able to stay the enmity of the carnal mind itself, and prepare the way for man again possessing and delighting in the fellowship of God. Nay, he must be able to endure, not only to be deprived of all support from the angels of light, but to be, for a season, forsaken by the Father of spirits, and to sustain the outpouring of all the vials of his wrath. He must be competent to sustain the unlimited and unmitigated vengeance which should have been visited on the myriads of a guilty world, as the just but awful punishment of their accumulated guilt. And what created being—what mere creature—could achieve and endure all that is here mentioned? The fallen angels have felt the arm and endured the wrath of the Almighty,—but each for his own iniquities only. It is a part of their *punishment* that they have not been utterly consumed but are doomed continually to bear it, being “reserved in everlasting chains, under darkness, unto the judgment of the great day.” Their case, therefore, can no more prove the capacity of any one of the

angelic host to expiate the sins and bear the iniquities of the world, than the existence of the spirits of ungodly men under the bitterness and blackness of perdition, can prove that any one of the guilty themselves could give a ransom for his own soul, and for the souls of countless myriads like himself, who are under the same condemnation.

We have here spoken of the necessity, not only of the Mediator being innocent, but of his *maintaining* his innocence in spite of the severest possible temptations and assaults. It must now be added, however, that even this is not sufficient. It is this which distinguishes the angels who have kept their first estate; but it is just what is required of them. Without it, they could not have fulfilled or discharged the obligations which they all along have individually owed to their Creator. In their righteousness and obedience, there is nothing which, in his sight, can be counted meritorious; and nothing, therefore, which, as not needed for themselves, can be available or acceptable for the justification of transgressors. If, at the best, they can do nothing more than discharge the duties which they personally owe to their Lawgiver and King, they must evidently be unable to furnish to others anything which can cover or compensate the neglect or violation of duty. They might have been appointed to some important service not disclosed to them by the original laws and impressions of their moral constitution; but, by these very laws, they must have been made to feel that the Author of their being had a right to impose on them, at any time, whatever special and positive precepts He pleased, these being necessarily right and reasonable in themselves, and in complete accordance with his own perfections. Being under an original and indefeasible obliga-

tion to obey and execute these, it was impossible that they could ever acquire any merit in their execution, or work out, on behalf of sinners, a righteousness in which the latter might safely trust, as adequate to secure their acceptance with God. He had, at first, assigned them duties amply sufficient, we may rest assured, to exercise the highest faculties and call forth their noblest energies. But supposing that He had not—supposing that new duties came to be made known and assigned to them, in which their original dignity and characteristic devotedness were to be peculiarly manifested—and manifested for the admiration, encouragement, and advantage of mankind—still, these new duties could never assume any higher character than the observance and fulfilment of obligations which they, as creatures, were bound to respect and fulfil, the moment they were revealed and enjoined. No creature, however exalted and glorious, could be made to those who had come into condemnation, “wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.” No being originally and essentially inferior to the Divine, could ever have been styled, “THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.” The obedience and righteousness of Christ are, in consequence of his essential equality with the eternal Father, and of his original exemption from all law but that of his own holy and sovereign will, totally and infinitely different from the obedience and righteousness which any other being could have exhibited. His is the *only* obedience that can be meritorious; and we may, without presumption, conclude that the intervention of a mediator was not more indispensable to the accomplishment of the Divine purpose of mercy on behalf of sinners than was the appointment of the Lord Jesus Christ to the glorious office of the mediatorship.

The necessity of this appointment may be argued, then, on the ground that no mere creature, even of the highest dignity and endowments, was able either to endure or to perform what was required, in following out the purpose, and fully executing the plan of redemption. And may it not be added that, if none but the Redeemer whom God actually appointed could bear the sufferings and achieve the victory, so He alone should enjoy the triumph and wear the crown? May it not be warrantably supposed that, though none but He could sustain the sufferings which were indispensable to the expiation of sin, these would never have been laid on him except in connection with "the glory that should follow?" It was such a glory as could not, and ought not to belong to any other. To any other, it would have been as overwhelming as the sufferings themselves. The radiance which invested the person of Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, or when the cloud received him out of the sight of his disciples on the hill of Ascension, would, to a mere creature, have been as overpowering as the terrible agony in the garden, or the still deeper horror of great darkness on the Cross. Salvation is the very highest act of kindness and love—the very highest manifestation both of wisdom and of power—that the annals of the world can ever possibly furnish. If mankind, then, were ever taught to regard it as the undertaking or the achievement of a mere creature—of a being who, however exalted, was essentially distinct from God—their gratitude and adoration would have been insensibly drawn away from the latter. The whole scheme would thus have been clogged with the monstrous absurdity which it must have involved, that, while it professed to restore man to the favour and approbation of God, and that, too, by reinstating Him in

the affections of man's heart—it, in point of fact, carried away these affections, and exalted a creature as the greatest benefactor of the human race! It would have been intercepting, by offering to an idol, all that incense of gratitude, all those oblations of praise, and all those fervours of devotion which the thought and the experience of the great salvation were calculated to call forth, to keep alive, and to invigorate.

The necessity of that Divine appointment for which we have here been arguing, has been argued from considerations which include and set forth the incalculable evil and magnitude of sin. If there were no other way to judge of the magnitude of this evil, the simple fact that this appointment has taken place, would present it before us, in its awful though unexaggerated dimensions. But, if we have not only this remarkable and unquestionable fact itself, but the strongest reasons for believing that, consistently with the honour of God and the salvation of man, the fact could not have been otherwise—this implies a peculiarly appalling yet faithful estimate of human guilt. And, if so costly a sacrifice needed to be made, and so arduous a work to be achieved, how greatly have the obligations of the guilty been increased! The indispensableness of such an appointment as that of the Son of God to be our Mediator and Redeemer, takes nothing away from the compassion, benevolence, and love which the appointment of a Redeemer indicates. If *such* a Redeemer was indispensable to the accomplishment of the purpose of salvation, is it not a proof of the most ineffable love, that such a purpose on behalf of sinners should ever have been entertained? Though none but the Son of God could be “a propitiation for the sins of the whole world,” and bring in an infinite, meritorious, and everlasting right-

eousness, yet God was under no necessity to provide for us such a propitiation. He might have spared his own Son, instead of delivering him up for us all, and have left us under the ruins of the Fall. The wonder is, indeed, that this was not the case. The nearer and the dearer that the Being was, who alone was able to save us to the uttermost, the more amazing and unsearchable is the wonder of redeeming love. All must be resolved into God's eternal purpose of manifesting his own glory in the glorifying of his Son. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE END OR PURPOSE OF THE DEATH OF THE SON OF MAN.

JOHN III. 14, 15, 17.

THE Son of Man was lifted up "that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life." The end here mentioned has unavoidably been alluded to in the course of the preceding illustrations. In pointing out the necessity of the Son of Man's being lifted up, it was impossible not to advert to the end for which it was appointed. The subject is again brought before us in the subsequent verses, in which it is stated that "God so loved the world, that He gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." It was for this purpose that the Son was given and sent into the world. This is another, and one of the most glorious of earthly things.

Now, it is an observation which is forced on us, that the statement here made respecting the end or purpose for which the Son of Man was lifted up, implies or takes for granted, that all mankind, as sinners, were *actually perishing*, or liable and on the way to certain and endless perdition. One of the points of resemblance between the lifting up on the Cross and the lifting up of the Serpent in the Wilderness, was, as we had occasion to notice, their being both appointed with a view to the healing of diseases and the preventing of death. But

neither in its acuteness, its malignity, nor its consequences, nor yet in the numbers to which its ravages extended, was the grievous malady occasioned by the fiery serpents at all equal to that dreadful and universal pestilence which the lifting up of the Son of Man was intended to arrest. It was a pestilence which had spread its malignant influence over the whole world,—which had infused its poison into all the individuals of all the families of our species,—and which, age after age, and generation after generation, entailed wretchedness and ruin on its thousands and tens of thousands. All mankind in their fallen state “are, by nature, the children of wrath.” They inherit the nature of the first transgressor, whose offspring they are. They are, in consequence of his disobedience, constituted sinners, having hearts naturally inclined to evil, and certain, if left to obey the bias of this inclination, to follow sinful courses and fall into vicious habits: They are all in the state which our Lord has described in the opening of this passage; and, without being born again, they cannot see or enter into the kingdom of God. They are necessarily and utterly incapable of accomplishing this spiritual renovation in themselves. Nay, it is a part of their woful disease, that they are, in most instances, insensible of its virulence, and indifferent as to their moral turpitude and deformity in the sight of God. They seldom experience any acute sensation of mental pain on account of their sins as such; because the seat of moral sensation—the conscience itself—is the principal seat of disease. All the tender and mysterious cords of gracious feeling are corroded, or rather, cut asunder,—just as in many cases of consumption of the lungs, there may be, to the very last, little acute pain experienced in that organ, simply because the nerves of sensation have themselves, in the

progress of the malady, been wasted and deadened. Sinners in their natural state are outcasts and aliens from their adorable Creator, being separated from his communion,—not more effectually by his judicial and awful sentence of banishment, than by those feelings of aversion and enmity towards Him which have arisen from their apostacy. They are justly described as “having no hope, and without God in the world.”

It must be admitted, indeed, that the continuance of mankind on the earth, after both their heart and their habitation had become polluted with sin, may be regarded as an indication and act of mercy on the part of that God against whom their sin was a rebellious outrage; but, considered by itself, and confined, for anything that we know, to the present life, this act of amnesty might seem to be nothing more than the postponement of punishment. The way, moreover, in which they generally make use of this amnesty is, not to seek after God, not to think how they may, or whether they can, be reinstated in his favour, but to depart from Him yet farther and farther. By innumerable acts of personal disobedience, they virtually say, “Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways.” In spending the life which God has given them, they daily evince how sadly they are alienated from the life of God,—the life which He approves, requires, and imparts. If left to the direct and necessary consequences of that line of conduct which they naturally pursue, they are certain to be at length as exquisitely miserable as they are already wofully infatuated. Only let them alone, and they will weave around themselves the net of their own captivity,—they will mix and fill the cup of their own sorrow,—they will sharpen the lash of their own punishment,—and set flames to the fuel of their own torment.

If, in this present life, they do not feel that it is really perdition to have lost the image, the love, and the favour of God, it is only because, independently of these, they possess some means of unsanctified, unsubstantial, and feverish enjoyment. Yet, let just their enmity against God continue, their sinful passions be indulged, and their whole nature become impregnated with a stronger infusion of earthliness. Let them be divested of those various organs and members which they have rendered the instruments of unrighteousness unto sin,—or let them be separated from this sordid and sensual world in which they have sought their chief or only portion of good things,—and, then, malignant spirits themselves,—the angels of darkness, who have beguiled them with their enchantments, need not desire a picture of more absolute wretchedness than that which they shall forthwith exhibit. Let them be removed from the tumult, intoxication, and gaiety of this sublunary scene, and buried in the gloomy solitude of abstraction, with nothing but the fellowship of their own bitter reflections, or the fellowship of beings whom the same sort of reflections has rendered miserable. Let there be nothing to prevent their realizing every moment the connection between suffering and sin, so that they may feel that their keenest pangs take their origin from those very pleasures into which they rushed with the greatest impetuosity, and in which they indulged with the most reckless and insatiable eagerness. Let there be nothing to prevent, but everything to force on them the thought of that God whom they have hated and cease not to hate, only because they have offended him, and because they can neither escape his observation, nor longer regard him as such a one as themselves. Let all this come to pass—and it would come to pass as the

natural and necessary result, if they were entirely left to themselves—and then would it be seen how justly our Lord has spoken, in representing all mankind to be by nature *under condemnation, and ready to perish*.

It is melancholy to think how little we are *affected* by such a representation. We can hear it declared, by what we acknowledge to be Divine authority, that the whole world are concluded and shut up under sin—that the whole world are guilty before God, and are under his wrath and curse—and yet, all the while, we evince or experience little or no emotion! We can read the death-warrant to which is affixed the seal of Him who has the power of life and death; and though it speaks of another and more awful separation than that between the soul and the body, yet—because it speaks of thousands and thousands being involved in the same terrible doom—we can lay aside the portentous document, without feeling much or perhaps any anxiety, about fleeing from “the wrath which cometh on the children of disobedience!” We can articulate the names of the most appalling realities, and enunciate the most momentous truths that ever were communicated respecting the world which is unseen, without any more attaching or seeking to attach to them a definite idea, or attempting to ponder and estimate them, than if they were the arbitrary symbols or simplified expressions of some physical fact or some mathematical proposition. With the deplorable gaiety of an unconscious idiot, who runs with an air of triumph to tell that he has swallowed what is deadly poison—or with the frenzied recklessness of a miserable lunatic, dancing on the edge of a dizzy precipice, or wildly flourishing a torch, one spark from which may, in an instant, explode the magazine by which he is

standing—we talk of, and tamper with, the horrors of everlasting destruction!

It is sufficiently melancholy and frightful to think that we can thus hear and speak, with little emotion, respecting anything which can be distinguished by such a term as *perdition*. It is sufficiently melancholy to think that we can thus hear and speak of what might be understood to be the annihilation of our souls, or the extinction of our being. But this is not nearly so appalling as what the term *perdition* really denotes. Annihilation, dismal and revolting as is the very thought of it, would be a welcome destiny to the ungodly, compared with that which actually awaits them. The *perdition* to which the Scriptures declare that they are liable, consists in the utter privation of enjoyment, and in the experience of the most intense, interminable, and uninterrupted agony. It is a destruction which is everlasting, because it is a calamity that never can be remedied, any more than the soul can be reconciled to its continuance. But it is a destruction which, instead of extinguishing the sentient and the accusing principle within us, implies that these principles continually exist, in a state of the most awakened and painful excitement. To be “punished” with such a “destruction” as this “from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power,” is what they who know Him not, and who desire not to know Him, have just cause indeed to apprehend. They have no relish for his presence, and no capacity for beholding his glory; but this will not diminish the anguish of that outer darkness into which they are to be cast. They have lightly esteemed the rock of salvation. They have put, and continue to put no value on the proclaimed beatitude of his fellowship

in the sanctuary above; yet their banishment shall be dreadful, because it shall be the signal for their being given over to the tormentors.—Such is the perishing condition in which all mankind, as sinners, are placed; and such is the thoughtlessness or the unconcern which they betray respecting it—and that, too, notwithstanding the most express and striking representations of it that are set before them in the Word of God.

But, along with these representations, the Word of God contains the most gracious and explicit statements respecting a scheme of *deliverance* which He has provided; and nowhere is that scheme more distinctly unfolded than in the passage now under review. We are here informed that the promised Saviour, under the designation of the Son of man, was to be lifted up, or put to death, in order “that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life”—and that “God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.” In this statement, the great end or purpose of his death is plainly and solemnly announced. There is here announced the gracious and determinate purpose of delivering from condemnation, and saving from the perdition which this involves, all of the perishing multitudes who believe in his name; and, moreover, of honouring and enriching them with all that is implied in a life of ineffable and everlasting happiness. Thus understood, the offer of salvation is absolutely unlimited; and yet not more unlimited than the salvation itself is complete. Wide as is the ruin, woful as is the wretchedness, and endless as is the duration of that perdition in which the human race have, through sin, been involved—it is a ruin which the salvation thus provided is sufficient fully to repair, and a wretchedness which it will not only speedily

terminate and completely remove, but which it is calculated to replace by the most consummate and ineffable felicity. During the continuance of this present life, even although the heart has been brought to entertain an aversion and hatred to sin, the individual is not exempted from the whole of those sufferings which the introduction of sin has occasioned. In the case of such an individual, however, all the remaining consequences of sin contribute to deepen his aversion to it, and become, in reality, instrumental in delivering him from its dominion. He is not to be exempted from death; but then, instead of leading to anything more awful than separation from the body and from all sublunary objects, death itself shall be swallowed up in victory. The gates of death shall become the entrance to immortality.

The heirs of salvation shall, after death, not only be delivered from all the penalties which are incurred through sin, and restored to a state of dignity, favour, and happiness, equal to that which was the original inheritance of man—but they shall enter into a kingdom which was prepared for them before the foundation of the world. They not only at present experience, by means of faith, a joy which is “unspeakable and full of glory,” but they shall, in due time, enter that “presence” where “there is fulness of joy,” and be admitted to that “right hand” where there “are pleasures for evermore.” The blessedness of “the saints in light” is not limited to the mere abolition of death—to the mere cancelling or expunging of the sentence of condemnation. Nay, it comprehends more than the restoration of those who are under that sentence, to all that man had enjoyed before that sentence was incurred. That blessedness is declared to be such as the eye of man has not seen, nor his ear heard, nor his heart conceived. The eternal life of which

the passage before us so emphatically speaks, is infinitely more precious than the unending possession of the highest happiness that this world, even in its primeval state, ever witnessed. To be indeed as the angels of God—nay, to be conformed to the moral image of God himself—to have our bodies fashioned after the likeness of the glorious body of Christ—to have our faculties fitted for the highest and holiest employments—to have no desires but those which it is both lawful and honourable to gratify—to have the means of such gratification always within our reach—to share all these honours and enjoyments with myriads of holy and happy spirits—to feel, at every moment, that all the enjoyments which we thus participate are the gift and effusion of Divine and unchangeable love—to know, to see, to delight in God, and in Him whom He has sent—this is eternal life; and this is the inheritance and portion of all who believe in the only begotten Son of God.

Such is a summary of what is comprehended in that *eternal life* which the Son of man was lifted up to procure for all who believe in him. But it is only “through faith in his blood” that sinners can be saved. By his one sacrifice on the Cross, he has made atonement for the sins of the whole world—that is, of all whom the Father had given him to redeem. The sacrifice was, in itself, complete the moment it was offered; but, of those to whom it is made known and preached, as the ground of their deliverance from condemnation, none are actually made partakers of its blessings, except through the exercise of faith—that faith which, as we have already seen, is one of the evidences of being born of the Spirit. The value and acceptableness of this sacrifice, in the sight of God, were not to be affected by the estimation in which it might be held, in many instances, among

men; but, in no instance, was it destined to accomplish the actual salvation of a sinner, without being, whether typically or historically, the object of believing contemplation and acceptance. Infants are capable of being regenerated, though necessarily incapable of faith while they continue in infancy; but those to whom Christ crucified is preached, as "the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth," can escape from the perdition to which all as sinners are liable, only "through faith in his name."

It has been previously noticed that the lifting up of the brazen serpent resembled the lifting up of the Son of man, with respect to the end to which it was subservient. But it may here be further observed, that there was something very remarkable in the emblem which was fixed on, for attracting the faith, and healing the diseases of the people,—it being an image of the very cause or instrument of all their sufferings. From this very circumstance, however, it was one of the most appropriate types that could have been instituted of that Redeemer who, though himself "in fashion as a man," and "in the likeness of sinful flesh," was yet qualified and ordained to take away the sins of the world. He "did no sin," in himself he "knew no sin," and "in his mouth there was no guile," yet he "was made to be sin for us." As the Representative and Redeemer of sinners, their sins were imputed to him, and he was dealt with and punished, not merely as a sinner, but as One on whom was "laid the iniquity of us all." The Lamb of God was, as he needed to be, "without blemish, and without spot;" and, therefore, in looking to him as one who was a partaker of flesh and blood, we look in reality to One who has at once "condemned" and expiated "sin in the flesh," and who has become "the Author of

eternal life to all them that obey him," and thereby manifest the character and power of their faith. We look to One who, "though he was crucified through weakness, yet liveth by the power of God," and who, though "he tasted death," did so for this special reason, among others, "that He might destroy death, and him that had the power of death." The sting of death is sin; and it is capable of inflicting infinitely greater pain than that which was occasioned by the fang of the fiery serpents. In sin, there is the venom of the old Serpent, the deceiver and destroyer of souls. The serpent of brass represented the reptiles under the visitation of which the Israelites cried out in agony, and it might fitly represent, in like manner, the fell contriver and author of our wretchedness and woe, who was a murderer from the beginning. But it pointed also, with a peculiar and precious significance, to Him who was manifested to destroy the works of the betrayer and murderer. As the brazen serpent, though in the likeness of those reptiles with which the people were tormented, was made the symbol and medium of relief,—and as the bow in the heavens, though intimating at the moment the presence of the falling rain, is the resplendent and covenanted pledge that the earth shall never again be deluged and desolated with water,—so Christ, though in the likeness of men, and put to death on account of sin, has, by that very death, purchased for believers eternal redemption from sin and all its woful consequences. "For, as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." "Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead."

The abject condition in which Jesus appeared, and the ignominious sufferings to which he was subjected,

were regarded by his countrymen as subversive of his claims to be received as the promised Messiah. A *suffering* Saviour was to most of them, if not a contradiction in terms, at least such "a rock of offence," that they would none of his salvation. Strange, however, as it might appear, we know that he is "the power of God, and the wisdom of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth." Incapable though we are, and must be, of explaining fully *how* His sufferings and death are adequate or subservient to this end, the texts formerly quoted, present to us the most ample and irresistible evidence of the *fact*. It is nowhere asserted, and never can be supposed, that, in consequence of the expiatory sufferings of Christ, the sins of the whole world have been literally extinguished, or that, in the records of the moral universe, there is now no such thing as human guilt to be found inscribed. As little is it asserted or can it be supposed, that his sufferings literally produced a change in the mind of the unchangeable God towards his creatures. God's willingness to show mercy was not induced or brought about by means of any thing that a mediator could do or suffer. On the contrary, the manifestation and sufferings of the Redeemer originated,—as we shall see more particularly in our next chapter,—in the inherent, spontaneous, infinite, and eternal mercy of God. But then, it was only in *connection* with these sufferings, that the Divine mercy was to be exhibited and offered to fallen man. In accomplishing the plan of redeeming love, in the most entire consistency with the immutable perfections of the Godhead, these sufferings were represented to be altogether indispensable. Hence they are regarded and spoken of as subservient to the blessed end which is now under consideration. Of this subserviency, we are distinctly assured in the state-

ment of the passage before us, and with such an assurance it becomes us to be satisfied. It fully meets and answers the most momentous question that the awakened and anxious sinner can put, "What must I do to be saved?"

Let us, then, direct our attention anew to the simple and unequivocal statement here given, that the Son of man was lifted up in order "that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life,"—should not be condemned to just and everlasting punishment, but should be saved. He was lifted up, not only with a view to the punishment and expiation of sin, but also to attract the attention, engage the heart, and call forth the faith of those in whose nature, for whose sins, and in whose stead he died. Their *faith* in his blood was, in its own place, as indispensable as the shedding of that blood itself, for their obtaining, through it, the remission of their sins. Unless there was something in his death which was calculated and certain, through the Spirit of grace, to awaken faith,—unless, connected with his death, some provision was made for imparting this principle, especially to those who sought it by prayer,—it is obvious that, notwithstanding the sacrifice of the Cross, not a single soul could have been reconciled to God. That no sinner has, or can have, the inherent and independent power of producing in himself the principle of faith, there is Scripture evidence in abundance to prove. It is expressly declared "that no man can say that Jesus is Lord, but by the Holy Ghost." We must not only be indebted to the mercy of God in Christ, for the atonement which the latter made for sin, when he "bare our sins in his own body on the tree," and indebted to it for establishing a necessary connection between faith and the attainment of the salvation which Christ has pur-

chased by his blood,—but we must be equally indebted to that mercy for the attainment of so precious a faith. Were the attainment or exhibition of this a matter entirely within our own power, the inheritance of eternal life would really be enjoyed in the same way as it would have been under the Covenant of works. We should then, in virtue of endowments and dispositions belonging to all mankind, as a part of their original constitution, have fulfilled the condition which our Creator and Law-giver had specified, as all that He required in order to the enjoyment of his highest approbation and favour. The difference between the two great dispensations under which our species have been placed—namely, the Covenant of works and the Covenant of grace—would, in this way, be abolished; or, rather, it would never have existed. The honour and merit of salvation would thus be divided between the Redeemer and those very creatures whose state he has here represented as, in itself, the most wretched and helpless that can be imagined; whereas the Apostle tells us that the promise of salvation “is of *faith*, that it might be by *grace*.”

The passage before us, indeed, plainly states, that God *gave* his only begotten Son, for the salvation of sinners; and it is to that Son evidently that reference is made, when the Apostle speaks of the thanks which are due to God “for his unspeakable *gift*.” Now, there is only one way in which any person can become a partaker of a gift. He must just receive or *accept* of it. This is all that is required, in order to its becoming actually his; but then this requisite is so indispensable, that, without it, he never can enjoy or possess what is offered. And this is the province which faith holds, and the office which it discharges when, in the Gospel, an unlimited offer is made of Christ as the Saviour, and of the salva-

tion which he brings. There is here, be it observed, the offer, not merely of a gift, but of a *free gift*,—one for which no remuneration is possible, one for which the only suitable return is gratitude, obedience, and love to the Giver, while even these, however largely and cordially tendered, instead of diminishing the amount of the sinner's obligation, only show the additional obligations under which he has been placed to Divine grace, for the exhibition of qualities and affections so totally different from those which are naturally inherent in his heart. The offer of salvation which God makes in the Gospel is, on his part, altogether gratuitous. It is made to those who, not only do not deserve it, but who deserve the very reverse—the utmost severity of his righteous indignation. It is made to *all*, and without any other condition—if such it can be called—than that of cordially and thankfully accepting it as a boon of infinite condescension and love. Nay, the very acceptance, or the disposition cordially to accept, of this salvation, implies that a certain measure of grace has been already imparted. We must remember that it is a salvation from the pleasures and pursuits of sin, as well as from its punishment,—a salvation which affords no hope of exemption from the latter, without the immediate, unqualified, and permanent renunciation of the former. All who really believe in the Son of God,—who receive and rest on Him alone for salvation,—have, in order to their so doing, received from him, through his Spirit, power to become the sons of God.

The glorious Redeemer, then, was lifted up, in order that they who believe in him might be saved, and in order also that sinners might be induced and *enabled* to believe in him. God, in thus setting forth his Son, is commanding and encouraging all men to look to him,

as the only and all-sufficient Saviour. In order that they may become partakers of the great salvation, it is necessary that this commandment be reverentially and seriously attended to. Their belief in him must have special and immediate reference to the great end of his "being put to death in the flesh." They must believe in him, not only as a Teacher sent from God,—not only as a Martyr for the truths which he was commanded to teach,—not only as a perfect pattern of all the virtues and graces which he inculcated, reconciling his disciples to poverty, reproach, and affliction, by the contentedness, humility, and devout resignation with which he endured these manifold trials. They must believe in him, not merely as encouraging them, by patient continuance in well-doing, to seek for glory, and honour, and immortality,—but as being "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." Though incapable in themselves of believing in him to the saving of their souls, they are not incapable of being convinced that it is their *duty* to do so, because God expressly commands it,—just as it is their duty to love the Lord their God with all their heart and soul, and strength, and mind, even although they are, in point of fact, under the influence of an enmity which his own Spirit alone can overcome. In requiring and exhorting them to believe in his Son, God is not mocking their impotence and insulting their wretchedness, but pledging his assistance and encouraging their supplications. He points to Him who was lifted up for the benefit of all, without exception, who are willing to partake of the benefit. They may rest assured, and it would be impious to doubt, that He who graciously, and of his own good pleasure, provided the ransom, will not suffer it to become unavailing through any want of means, on his part, to have it applied to

those who ask Him. Those, therefore, to whom this salvation is preached are evidently without excuse, if they do not believe in Him "whom God hath sent." The renewed exhortation and command of the Redeemer is still in these solemn but encouraging words,—“Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth ; for I am God, and there is none else.” These are the words of Him who proclaims himself to be, “a Just God and a Saviour.”

Such is the solemn and gracious call which the God of salvation addresses to those who are ready to perish. If there are any of them still foolish enough to imagine that they are not at all affected with any spiritual disease, and, at all events, that they are far from actually perishing,—if they flatter themselves that there is a kind of rectifying and healing principle in their moral constitution, which will silently work out their perfect recovery,—if, admitting that remedies, and powerful ones too, need to be applied, they yet deny the efficacy or fitness of that which is here pointed out,—they must take the consequences, however dreadful. If they will have aid of their own choosing, and despise every cure in the merit of which they themselves are not allowed to have any, even the slightest share,—if they deem the interposition of Omnipotence in their behalf altogether superfluous or incredible,—if they make even the pre-eminent and infallible skill of the Physician, as well as the gratuitousness of his ministrations, an argument against their being accepted,—they must reap the inevitable fruit of their own self-righteous delusion. If they resolve, for the present, to content themselves with their condition and dismiss all concern on the subject,—if, flattering themselves that, should it come, at last, to the necessity of applying to Him whose name is *Jesus*, because

he saves his people from their sins, they have still the certainty of a cure awaiting them,—then do they, thus far and in the meantime, “put from them the Word of God, and judge themselves unworthy of everlasting life.” They deliberately renounce all interest in that salvation, the chief and peculiar benefits of which are expressly confined to those who exercise or implore that faith of which they are willing to continue destitute. And “how shall they escape, if they neglect so great salvation?”

How adorable the wisdom and the grace of God in forming a plan of salvation by which the hope of eternal life is confined to those who *believe*, but extended to all such, without any other qualification or condition? In no case will God give his glory to another, and least of all in the matter of salvation. In bestowing this, He does it in a way which is peculiarly “to the praise of the glory of his grace.” To the chief of sinners there is preached the forgiveness of sins, simply through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Past iniquities and present infirmities, how demonstrative soever they may be of our guilt and wretchedness, are no more allowed to exclude us from the healing influences of the Cross, than the burning pain and the utter helplessness of the Israelites were allowed to exclude them from the privilege of looking on the brazen serpent. Were it otherwise, who could be saved? for who can say he has no sin? The disease under which we labour is one which, instead of entitling us to the interposition of Him who alone can heal us, might justly subject us to his unmitigated indignation. But since He has been pleased, in his infinite goodness, to point out and provide a remedy, it cannot be supposed that the existence of the disease should exclude us from the benefit of that very remedy which Himself has appointed for its removal. “They that are

whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.' When salvation through Jesus Christ is preached, what is this but the preaching of the forgiveness of sins? and it is just to *sinner*s that it is preached. But then, on the other hand, as it is said, "*Believe* in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved," it is impossible that any one can partake of this salvation and yet continue the willing votary and servant of sin. He cannot become a partaker of it without faith,—a principle which, as it is imparted by God himself, so it is most incompatible with the love of any thing which is so opposite as sin is to his nature and government. Faith cannot both embrace the Saviour, and, at the same time, leave the soul to yield itself to the indulgence or the service of the sins which nailed Him to the Cross, and instigated all the insults and mockeries with which he was treated by his enemies.

Past sins do not unfit us for the reception of pardon. Present sins, however,—sins committed or indulged in even while an offer of pardon is made to us, and urged on our acceptance, and still more, sins committed under the influence of a conscious disposition or intention to continue in them, for an indefinite period at least,—will evidently demonstrate that we have not obtained, and that really we do not value, the privilege of forgiveness. God does not authorize us to imagine that all sins previous to conversion may be regarded as of the same nature, and that in estimating our guilt it will not signify whether they have been more or less heinous, and more or less numerous. He gives us to understand only that, be they what they may, He offers us, through Christ, free pardon and complete salvation; and that, if this offer be accepted, these sins shall not prevent our being both forgiven and received into favour,—while

the further and more aggravated sin of *refusing* to believe in Him whom God has sent, must involve us in inevitable ruin. In this manner, the hope of salvation is earnestly held out to all; and all the credit and praise of the offered blessing are justly claimed by Him who is truly and exclusively its Author. At the same time, with a sacred and unalterable regard to the holiness of his own nature, the honour of his law, and the character of his children, He has rendered it impossible that any one should rank among them, enjoy their peculiar privileges, or have any solid evidences of being "accepted in the Beloved," without the formation and exercise of that principle of faith by which these are willingly, but necessarily, led to "deny themselves to all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, and righteously, and godly, in this present world."

Such, then, is the adorable wisdom displayed in the end for which the Son of Man was lifted up, namely, the salvation of them that believe in him—that look to him to be saved. Such is the adorable wisdom displayed in making faith—faith which gives all the honour to the Saviour, while it constrains its possessor to adorn his doctrine by a holy life—the only medium of salvation. Such is the way in which God bestows eternal life, with all its unspeakable blessings, on those who, in consequence of sin, are universally liable to punishment. He bestows it on them that believe. He is "the Justifier of him who believeth in Jesus,"—of the person who, though till that moment ungodly, has then, through "the Spirit of adoption" sent into his heart, been taught and enabled to cry, "Abba, Father." Every such person has become a partaker of a new nature; and has thus had the bent and current of his affections effectually turned away from all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, to serve the Living God.

CHAPTER X.

THE GREATNESS OF GOD'S LOVE HIS MOTIVE IN SENDING HIS SON INTO THE WORLD.

JOHN III. 16.

THE end or purpose of God's sending his Son into the world was, as we have been considering, that of saving sinners from perdition. The purpose and method of this salvation constituted the most marvellous, momentous, and glorious of the heavenly things which He who was that Son himself had to announce to Nicodemus. A purpose so transcendently great and illustrious could have originated only with God himself, and the motive—so to speak—from which it proceeded, or the feeling on his part which it indicated, was one of the most heavenly and wondrous things of all. In what way the entertainment, manifestation, and accomplishment of this purpose and plan of redemption may operate on the enlightenment, interests, allegiance, and felicity of the moral universe at large, it is impossible for us, with our limited apprehensions, either to discover or even to imagine. Enough is known of it, however, to enable us to perceive that it affords the most transcendently glorious display of all the Divine perfections. "The mystery which had been hid from ages and from generations, is now made manifest to his saints,—to the intent," we are informed, "that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known,

by the Church, the manifold wisdom of God." We may venture to assert, though with the deepest reverence, that God himself cannot but be actuated in all His counsels and proceedings by a regard to the glory of the Godhead, and that this is the highest and holiest of all considerations by which He ever could, or ever can, be actuated. In the marvellous plan of salvation, all the Persons of the Godhead are glorified together, and manifest a concern in each other's glory. Hence the language of the Son in His intercessory prayer:—"Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee.—I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me, with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was." The Father, in like manner, after a previous and similar prayer, "Father, glorify thy name," demonstrated His full accordance with the Son; for we are told, "Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again." The Spirit, also, participates in this glory. He is the Spirit of Truth. It has been inspired and dictated by Him. It is of Him that every regenerate soul is born. He brings and unites the converted sinner to Christ. He sanctifies believers through the truth, and perfects them in the Divine image. Hence an apostle encourages them under sufferings to rejoice, "for," says he, "the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you."

But while, in preparing and carrying into effect the wondrous plan of saving from perdition sinners of the human race, God has undoubtedly had in view manifold and transcendent objects connected with the glory and welfare of His universal dominion, still, in so far as

regards sinners themselves, the grand motive of His interposition in their behalf was just "the great love wherewith He loved them." "For," said Jesus in the passage before us, "God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." To the same effect, the Apostle Paul has said, "But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners,"—or, as he has it in the next verse but one, "enemies,"—"Christ died for us." The language of the Apostle John is, if possible, still more striking and memorable. "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." These are tidings, the marvellousness of which is equalled only by the greatness of the joy which they are calculated to produce. When we reflect on the pollution and depravity of a world that knew not God, and consider that the very wretchedness in which it was sunk was the direct and righteous consequence of its guiltiness in His sight, we should naturally be led to suppose that there would have remained for it nothing "but a certain fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation." Instead of hearing of God's loving the world with a love so great and so unparalleled, we may well be astonished to hear that He could, in such a case, love it at all.

When we attend, however, to the solemn and gracious statements made, on the authority of God himself, to the doings which He has actually carried out, and to the demonstrations which, age after age, He has given, that his thoughts toward our guilty race have been

“thoughts of peace and not of evil,” we are compelled to acknowledge that the plan on which He has acted, and the proceedings which He has adopted, can have had, so far as sinners themselves are concerned, their origin in nothing but *love*, and such a love as “passeth knowledge.” Immediately after the first and great transgression, our common ancestors, under the consciousness of even that one act of disobedience, trembled at the voice of their approaching Sovereign, in the instinctive and inevitable anticipation of his wrath. And had any of their posterity, after sins had been fearfully multiplied on the earth, and without any knowledge of the promise given to our first parents before their expulsion from Eden, received simply the intelligence that the Son of God was about to make his appearance among them—their instant and only conclusion would have been, that his errand was to be one, not of salvation, but of awful retribution. Well may we, then, be astonished to be informed as to the real and gracious purpose of his coming. Exposed as sinners were to his wrath, and manifestly as they were on the way to perish, the Scriptures here quoted emphatically assure us that God, out of his unparalleled love to them, sent his Son into the world, for the very purpose of rescuing them from perdition. They were under his wrath before his Son was sent, and this, instead of hindering God from sending him, was one of the principal reasons, and certainly the most conspicuous reason, for sending him; but if that wrath lay on them before the Son was sent or revealed, with what awfully aggravated weight must it abide on them, if the salvation which he brings is rejected, and the very love which prompted his undertaking, is slighted and insulted?

It is true, and must not be forgotten, that, although

God's sending his Son into the world to save sinners is ascribed to the unspeakable greatness of his *love* to them, that love was as peculiar as it was great. He could have no *complacency* or *delight* in them as both polluted and rebellious creatures. It was only such a love to them as was in accordance with his own character—with all his other infinite and unchangeable perfections. It was only such a love as could exist in the Divine mind along with the hatred of their sins, and with their being, on account of these, the objects of his righteous displeasure. God could not love sinners in this state, in the same way that He loved those angels who had never sinned; or in the same way that He loved his own Son, by the gift of whom—by whose humiliation and sufferings in the nature of which he was made a partaker—He graciously interposed for their deliverance from guilt and ruin. He certainly could not love those who had lost the Divine image in the same way that He loved those who had retained it. But He loved them in such a way as graciously to prepare and put in operation a plan for restoring them to the image which sin had effaced, and thus for rendering them again, and for ever, well-pleasing in his sight. He thus loved them with a love of compassion and benevolence, so that, by lifting them into a new and sacred position, He might eventually love them with approbation and complacency—even with the love which He delights to cherish toward his own regenerate children. He loved them, in the one way, even when they were dead in trespasses and sins; and having, through this exercise of love, quickened them together with Christ, He comes to love them, in the other, when He sees and rejoices in them as those who are “alive unto God,” and walking before Him in “newness of life.” He loved them first,

when they had in them nothing that was lovely; He loves them afterwards, when He has imparted to them somewhat of his own loveliness, and beautified them with his salvation. He loved them, even while in their sins, in the only way in which they could be loved by a being of infinite holiness. The compassionate and gracious feeling which visited them then, was as truly *love* as that by which the redeemed shall be ultimately welcomed into the joy of their Lord—how different soever the circumstances and character of those toward whom it is felt, and the special manifestations by which it may be expressed.

The love toward sinners which operated with God in sending his Son into the world, is love of a kind which has been most beautifully illustrated by Jesus himself in the touching parable of the prodigal son. The prodigal had lived and acted in a way which had justly incurred his father's highest displeasure, and which was well fitted not only deeply to wound his feelings, but even to break his heart. Such, however, were the strength and ardour of that father's love, that it made him often long and look for his son, and rendered him more than ready to encourage and welcome his return. The prodigal, meanwhile, urged by his privations and sufferings, loaded with a deep sense at once of his degradation and waywardness, and encouraged by the remembrance of all the tenderness and affection which he had formerly enjoyed, resolved, at length, to arise and go to his father, and, confessing his sins, to make a humble appeal to the compassion which he so greatly needed but so little deserved. The eye of parental love was already on the outlook, and on his homeward path, "When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and

kissed him." This outburst of fatherly affection anticipated the language of the penitent: "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." He had, at first, purposed to add, "Make me as one of thy hired servants;" but his father's arms were now around his neck, and his ardent kisses, mingled with glowing tears, were felt on his cheek. To speak, at such a moment, of being recognised and retained only as a *servant*, would have been nothing short of a fresh insult to that love which had often longed, and at length rejoiced, to press him again, and as if for ever, to a father's breast. Such, we are warranted by the Son of God himself to say, is the nature, the reality, and the intensity of that *love* where-with God has loved a guilty world—ready, but for this, to perish in its sins.

Love, then, is the true name of the feeling which God has entertained toward the souls of men, and which He has so signally manifested by sending his Son into the world. In this view of it, such a proceeding was the best calculated to make a deep and powerful impression on their hearts. The love, as He himself declares it to be, which it bespeaks, on his part, is best fitted to awaken love in theirs. "We love Him," says the Apostle, "because He first loved us." Not that the mere contemplation of that love in the way in which it was so wondrously evinced, could, of itself, and however thoughtful and prolonged, awaken genuine love to God, in any unregenerate heart,—but as a great and glorious fact to which the Spirit appeals in his gracious dealings with the soul of a sinner, it presents a *motive* for loving God, the tenderest and yet the strongest that can be employed to call forth the devout and grateful, as well as penitent affections of the human soul. The contemplation of that

amazing love wherewith God has loved us in Christ Jesus, is that which, in the hands of the Blessed Spirit, is fitted, above all things, to make us love Him in return. It is the thoughtful and repeated contemplation of that love, which is best fitted to divorce our hearts from the love and indulgence of sin, and to strengthen the sense of obligation under which we are placed to love and obey the Author of our being and the God of salvation. Hence the experience and decision of the Apostle: "For the love of Christ"—in giving himself for sinners—"constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead"—or rather, "Then all died," as by their Substitute:—"and that he died for all, that they who live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him who died for them, and rose again."

The purpose entertained and the methods employed for the salvation of sinners, were, no doubt, such as engaged the harmonious co-operation of each of the Three Persons in the united, indivisible, and glorious Godhead. The love of each of these toward a perishing world, was intimately concerned with the mission and work of the Redeemer,—which constituted, indeed, by far the most transcendent manifestation of that love. It is specially called, however, the love of the FATHER,—who "spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all;" and it is in this light that we ought specially to view it. Now, even with the explanations which have just been offered, as to the particular nature and aspect of that love, when exercised toward those who, as lying and living in sin, could not fail to be the objects of God's righteous disapprobation and holy displeasure,—the exercise of it, in the manner and to the extent set forth in this and kindred passages of Scripture, is very astonishing,—although, perhaps, in the universe of mind,

there are many beings who are more struck with it than sinners themselves. Mankind, it is true, had become wretched, and were ready to perish. God has shown himself to be full of compassion, and could not be indifferent to their wretchedness. But this, however great and deplorable, was not greater than the guilt and rebellion from which it sprang; and infinite as was the compassion of God—ininitely far as it was from Him to have pleasure in the death of sinners—equally infinite was his love to righteousness and to judgment. Neither their rebellion nor their misery could, in the slightest degree, unsettle his throne or disturb his tranquillity. He could have crushed them in a moment, as He did the apostate angels; and his happiness would have been no more impaired by the want of their adorations than by the want of the adorations of those who were thrust out of heaven. Before either of these orders of beings existed,—ere yet “the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy,”—He whose blessedness, even then, was such as could not be increased, was One from whose essential felicity, the revolt or the extinction of all these could take nothing away. What but disinterested love could move him to interpose for the salvation of creatures who were, at the moment, excluded from his sacred presence and averse to his service? He against whom mankind had rebelled, was bound, by a supreme regard to his own glory and the best interests of his dutiful subjects, to punish every act of rebellion; and He possessed the most ample means of inflicting this punishment. Yet, let it be held in everlasting remembrance, and made the theme of endless adoration to the holy spirits in all parts of his dominions, that He interposed for the deliverance of sinners of the human race, and made bare for them an arm of salvation.

Nothing but *love* on the part of God,—love of such a kind as has been already explained,—could account for his gracious interposition on behalf of those who deserved his righteous vengeance ; and against the purity, the disinterestedness, and the consistency of that love, not the slightest allegation can fairly be brought. It is impossible to allege, that He has sought the happiness of sinners of mankind only because He could not endure, so to speak, the existence and sight of misery ; for He has endured, or rather permitted, and is permitting both. This is manifest, not only in the case of the fallen angels whom He has left to perish, but also in the case of those unhappy individuals of the human race who, besides having lived in sin and being laden with iniquities, have turned away from the plainest intimations and the most precious and urgent offers of his mercy, and who are now, therefore, receiving their portion with hypocrites and unbelievers. Nor can it be alleged that his interposition on behalf of sinners of the human race, has proceeded from a doting partiality for this part of his intelligent offspring. Such a feeling is often the source of the favours which earthly parents bestow on their children ; but it is one by which the Father of Spirits—the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ—is incapable of being influenced. Our first parents, made after his own image, must, while that image was retained, have acted in a way which was altogether well-pleasing in his sight ; but this could not lay the foundation for any partiality which might not, as easily, have been alleged on behalf of the angels that kept not their first estate. Nay, the preciousness of the souls that were lost was, in the case of the latter, still more precious than in the case of the former. No account, therefore, can, in this way, be given, why God

did not prefer the salvation of angels to the salvation of men; or, at least, why He did not extend his mercy to both. And if He was not influenced by unworthy or inexplicable partiality, as little can his procedure be ascribed to a merely capricious determination. Sovereign and absolute as He must be in all his plans and purposes,—although, as He himself said to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy,”—his is the absoluteness, not of caprice, but of infallible wisdom.

There cannot, indeed, be a doubt but that, as his treatment of the angels who sinned has been so different from his treatment of our fallen race, there have been the wisest and the most righteous reasons for his making a difference. But all that we can know of these reasons is simply this—that they did not consist in any claims or deservings on the part of man. The first man, as a transgressor, forfeited his own life, and, therefore, it cannot have been out of consideration to any claims of his, that he was permitted to communicate life to others. It is not improbable that this permission would never have been given, had it not been accompanied, as in point of fact it was, with just such a plan of salvation as that which we are now considering; yet, since no posterity that could spring from fallen man, could have had anything in their heart or life to commend them to God, they evidently could have had nothing to entitle them to the hope or privilege of eternal felicity. Had it accorded with the plans of the Divine Government, He might have limited the misery which sin had introduced, by preventing the rise of offspring altogether; but surely, if such offspring had no title to existence, they could, as guilty, have no title to salvation.

Whether or not the different treatment which the rebel angels experienced were owing to any peculiarity

in the circumstances of their rebellion, it is not for us to conjecture ; but it is a matter of *fact*, that these circumstances were materially *different* from those under which Adam sinned, and under which his sinful posterity were permitted to exist. The angels were the *first* who sinned, and thus introduced confusion and every evil work into the universe of God. They sinned without being subjected to the artifices and temptations of beings of higher powers and influence than their own. They sinned, moreover, each voluntarily and in his own person,—having a *conscious* share in the revolt which involved their common ruin. But, although we are neither qualified nor permitted to enter into the reasons which God had for treating the two great families of the guilty in ways so different, we may be absolutely certain that he had the gravest, the holiest, and the profoundest reasons for his doing so; and that his administration was not more perfectly free, in the one case, from every thing like capricious and uncalled-for severity, than it was, in the other, from every thing like capricious tenderness,—a tenderness, neither directed by any rational and exalted principle, nor devoted to any noble, beneficent, and holy end.—It is thus manifest, from every view that can be taken of the procedure of God in adopting and following the plan of salvation, that He has been actuated by the most unfeigned, disinterested, and sovereign *love* toward the children of men.

In considering this love, however, as that in which that gracious plan originated, our attention is directed, by the words of the passage before us, not merely to the nature, reality, and genuineness, but very specially to the *greatness* of the principle. It was no ordinary love, even for the all-bountiful and gracious Fountain of life.

and happiness to entertain. The love spoken of must have been one of unparalleled greatness or extent, when "God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." There is no need to recapitulate—it is enough simply to refer to—the statements made, in the preceding chapter, as to the end and purpose of the Incarnation and Death of God's own Son. Great and glorious as were the ends contemplated, impossible as it was for any one but the Son to accomplish them, and pre-eminently befitting or indispensable as it was, that He who had given the brightest display of the Divine glory, in vindicating the justice, and opening the way for exercising the mercy of God,—should himself "receive from God the Father honour and glory," it was yet an exercise and exhibition of the purest and most amazing love on the part of God toward men, when He set forth His own Son, that they might obtain redemption through His blood. He did not deem it enough to deliver the guilty from perdition, nor yet simply to reinstate them in such enjoyments as man, in his state of primeval innocence, had tasted, or even to elevate them to such as they might have reached had he never fallen from that state. He did not deem it sufficient to place them, as nearly as possible, on the same footing as at first,—to give them the benefit of the same promises, the same warnings, and the same conditions,—all of which might have been thwarted by the same artful and malignant temptations. He provided for nothing less than their final deliverance from all that has been already spoken of as included in the state of perdition; and for the admission of all who believe in His Son, to an inheritance of glory, honour, and immortality. He contemplated their being, even in this

present life, accepted as righteous in His sight, "being justified freely by His grace." He contemplated their being here, not only renewed in the spirit of their minds, but more and more conformed to the image of Him who created them, and adorned them with that holiness which is, not only an essential means, but a most important element, of true happiness. These, all these gracious and momentous designs on behalf of fallen man, have sprung from the pure, spontaneous, and ineffable love of God. This, and this only, accounts,—and accounts fully,—for the glorious purpose which He has entertained from everlasting ages, and which is already so far advanced toward its consummation; but then, in itself how infinite and unsearchable this love of the Father!

Great, indeed, must be that love in which has originated a plan for bestowing eternal life and ineffable blessedness on innumerable multitudes of those whom Divine justice, operating alone, would have consigned to utter and endless woe. What a delight must He, who is the Father of mercies and the God of love, take in bestowing and beholding happiness! How truly adorable is this attribute of Godhead, especially when we consider that it is impossible for God to confer true felicity on any of his intelligent and accountable offspring, without conforming them to his own moral image,—without making them in sentiment, affection, and pursuit, congenial to his own nature,—without making them place their chief happiness in the enjoyment of his favour, and in the participation of his gracious and holy fellowship! To this delight which He feels in the communication and extension of happiness, the whole revelation which He has granted to mankind bears unequivocal and ample testimony. In its leading aspects, it is alto-

gether indicative of benignity, condescension, and love. It proclaims pardon to the guilty, and comfort to the miserable, whatever be the amount of their guilt, or the complexion of their miseries. The revelation even of his wrath against sin, is followed by an earnest and affectionate exhortation to flee from that wrath, and to lay hold on eternal life. "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live." "The Lord is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

The greatness of the love, however, which we are now considering is best illustrated by the astonishing nature of that *undertaking* for which it alone is sufficient to account. It is to be estimated, not only by the greatness of the salvation which it contemplated and designed on behalf of sinners, even the chief, but especially by the amazing and unparalleled expedient by which that salvation was to be accomplished. This expedient was nothing less than the incarnation, sufferings, and death of God's own dearly beloved Son. For the appointment of such a Mediator and such a sacrifice, how unspeakably are they indebted to this love! "Behold what manner of love,"—even in this appointment, and not to speak of its results,—“the Father hath bestowed on us!” When we reflect on what has already appeared of the dignity and divinity of Him who is here styled “the Son of man,”—on the other titles also which belong to him,—on the equality which belongs to him with God himself,—on the glory which is so emphatically ascribed to him,—on the works by which it was manifested,—and on the worship which the Father commands even the angels to render to him,—and when, after all this, we listen to the tidings that a human body was prepared for him, so that

he might be put to death in the flesh, as an expiatory sacrifice for all the sins of all those whom the Father gave him to save from perdition, and to "bring unto glory,"—we cannot but be filled with the profoundest astonishment. The appointment of *such a substitute* and such a sacrifice is so surpassingly wonderful, that many of the unbelievers plead the very greatness and splendour of the means proclaimed for the salvation of sinners, as an excuse or vindication for their unbelief! In this, they greatly "err, not knowing the Scriptures," nor the love, any more than "the power of God." But, by such a plea or objection, even these unbelievers acknowledge and attest the marvellousness and incomprehensible grandeur of that love wherewith the Author of this plan—supposing it to exist—must have been actuated in forming it, and bringing it into operation.

It is true, indeed, as has been previously illustrated, that the wages of sin is death,—that blood needed to be shed ere sin could be forgiven; and that no blood but that of the Lamb of God could be acceptable or available, for expiating the guilt of those who were ready to perish. But then, if the redemption of sinners could not be accomplished, without God's delivering up the Son of his love to death, that very circumstance only makes it the more wonderful that the *purpose* of saving them should ever have been entertained. What an amount of compassion and love do the entertaining and following out of this purpose imply, toward the souls of the guilty and miserable! That Son had been, from all eternity, the object of his Father's ineffable love and delight. "In the beginning," says he, "I was by Him, as one brought up with Him; I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before Him." In that Son, the Father had beheld,

not merely the reflected image of his own Divine excellence, such as was exhibited by the glorious spirits who surround his celestial throne, or such as was exhibited even by man himself, in his original state of holiness and dignity,—but that uncreated and unvarying effulgence which had for ever encompassed his own Godhead. In Him He beheld, not the higher gradations of holiness, wisdom, and power, but of all these the absolute infinitude and perfection,—the holiness, wisdom, and power, from which all the measures of these among the various denominations of his creatures, were entirely derived. There could not be a ray of light, a lineament of comeliness, or a tint of beauty,—there could not be an orb in the heavens, a drop in the ocean, a leaf on the earth, or a tremor in the air,—there could not be the movement of a limb, the utterance of a word, the pondering of a thought, or the darting of an imagination, among any of all the ranks of living existences, that did not bear testimony to the omnipotence of that Eternal Word by whom all things were made, and in whom all things subsist. The Father himself was not more perfectly and ineffably blessed than the Son was perfectly One with the Father,—One with Him in nature and essence, in wisdom, power, and glory,—One with Him in affection, benignity, and beatitude.

Yet this was He who was to be made in the likeness of men, to take upon him the form of a servant, to humble himself, and become obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross! This was He whom it pleased JEHOVAH to bruise, and put to grief, and whose soul was to be made an offering for sin. This is the Equal against whom the sword of Jehovah was to awake,—from whom his countenance, even at the moment when his delight in him, personally, was the highest that could

be felt, was in anger to be turned away! This is He who, though clothed with honour and with majesty, was to be found "wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger." This is He who could say, "Behold, at my rebuke I dry up the sea; I make the rivers a wilderness;" and yet the time was appointed to be, when He was to ask, of one of the creatures of his hand, a cup of water to drink. This is He who commandeth the sun and it riseth not, and who sealeth up the stars; and yet the time was to come, when that sun was, even in his mid-day splendour, to be shrouded in darkness, while *His* soul was in deepest tribulation under the judicial hiding of his Father's countenance. This is He who is represented as the brightness of the Father's glory, as the Prince of life, who has the keys of the unseen world and of death; and yet the time was to come, when over his face the paleness of death was to be spread, and when his lifeless body was to be swathed in the cerements of the tomb. The time was to come, when his holy human soul was to be in a protracted and inconceivable agony,—when He was to be "exceeding sorrowful, even unto death;" and when He might say, "Reproach hath broken my heart, and I am full of heaviness: and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none." "This"—all this—"is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes."

Surely, then, that was a high estimate which God put on the souls of men, and that was a *love passing knowledge* which He entertained toward them, when He determined to redeem them, at such a price as the precious blood of Christ, his own incarnate Son, God manifest in the flesh. Considering the constitution of the Redeemer's person—the union in him of the Divine and human nature—how justly and strikingly

has Paul, in his address to the elders from Ephesus; spoken of "the Church of God, which He hath purchased with his *own* blood!" Yet, in order that we may rightly appreciate the inestimable love of God to the human race, we must bear in mind that his *own dear Son* was, all the while, the object of a still more sublime and unsearchable *love*. In Him He continued to be infinitely well pleased. He loved Him, not merely as He loved those whose happiness He had a delight in restoring, or those who, by never ceasing to obey their Creator, had never forfeited his favour, or the happiness which its possession implies. He loved Him, as the very counterpart of his own perfections. He loved Him, as one the actual attributes of whose character came up to the very highest conceptions that Deity itself could entertain of all that was transcendently glorious—because they were just the attributes which God himself possessed, and in the exercise and manifestation of which He was supremely and eternally blessed. In the interchange and exhibition of their glorious and immutable perfections among the persons of the undivided and adorable Godhead, must their ineffable beatitude mainly consist. This sublime truth is the significant statement, enunciated both by the Evangelist and by our Lord himself—"The Father loveth the Son." God did not give up his Son to die for sinners of mankind because the measure of his love to *them* was greater than that of his love to *Him*—nor because He felt a deeper interest in their honour and happiness than in his. It was quite the reverse. But He *so* loved the world, that, in order to save them from perdition, and fit them to behold and partake of his glory, He ordained Him to "suffer once for sins, the just for the unjust." Even in this appointment, however, the honour of the Son, and his

subsequent exaltation in the character of Mediator—in which he had submitted to such an amazing humiliation—were ever kept prominently in view. He was yet, in the final salvation of all whom the Father had given him, to “see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied.”

Before concluding this subject, let it be observed that, while it is the love of the *Father* to the world that is commonly mentioned—the love of the Son also, in giving himself for the Church, in giving his life for his sheep, in giving his flesh for the life of the world, and in laying down his life for his friends—is thus, again and again, very emphatically declared. The Godhead, indeed, were at one—gloriously at one—in that which serves so pre-eminently to illustrate the Divine glory. In nothing is the oneness of the Father and the Son more conspicuous than in the love which both have manifested in the salvation of sinners. In the passage before us, Jesus himself proclaims, and with manifest delight, the greatness of the Father’s love to a perishing world; and he does so, with a delight which is not impaired, but enhanced, by the consideration that he himself was to be the “Lamb brought to the slaughter.” “Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God.”

Not only, indeed, is the Father’s love to the world equalled by that of the Son, but it is from the more palpable manifestations of the latter, that we are assisted in our estimate of both. Out of love to the souls of men, the Father gave up his Son to sorrow, ignominy, suffering, insults, and death; and certainly this love cannot be estimated, without reflecting that it implied a full and intimate perception of every state of mind and

every instant of pain which were to enter into the history of the Mediator's bitter experience. But the actual occurrence and delineation of what he underwent are much more level to the comprehension of man, and much more likely than this general consideration to make an impression on his heart. It is not so much the contemplation of the gracious purpose, all along entertained, of God's sending his Son into the world, "to seek and to save that which was lost," as it is the wondrous development and affecting narrative of his actual and expiatory sufferings, which can convey to us an impressive idea of that love in which the whole mysterious plan of salvation had its origin. The reading and even right understanding of what the prophets had foretold concerning the sufferings of Christ, could not have been so affecting as standing by the Cross, and afterwards recalling and reviewing the incidents, in the light of his speedy resurrection. It is not till we attend to the privations which the Son of man endured—to the cruel mockings with which he was assailed—to the conflicts which he had to undergo—to the cries which he uttered and the tears which he shed—to the agony of his groaning in spirit, that we have a vivid impression of his love. It is not, moreover, till we attend to the ceaseless distress which, day by day, he had experienced, during the whole of his sojourn on the earth—to his distress in beholding the deportment, and encountering the evil conversation of those who were alienated in character from all that he could look on with delight—it is not till we reflect that, not only in the prospect, but in the midst of all these things, he persevered in his blessed undertaking, without his wondrous love either being quenched, or even cooled for a moment—that we

are able, in any measure, to comprehend the unspeakable greatness of the love with which the Son, as well as the Father, has loved those who might have been left for ever under the wrath which was due to the children of disobedience.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CONDITION OF BELIEVERS—NOT CONDEMNED.

JOHN III. 18.

OUR Lord had successively unfolded to Nicodemus the necessity of the Son of Man's being lifted up—the end or purpose for which this astonishing sacrifice was to be offered—and the unparalleled love of God toward men, in which the appointment of the sacrifice had its origin. He then proceeded to make a solemn declaration as to the spiritual condition of those who believe, and of those who do not believe, in Him who was thus given for the life of the world,—namely, the only-begotten Son of God. In other words, he solemnly intimated the condition and prospects of believers, and of unbelievers in the Divine and only Saviour.

It was manifest, from the statements which Jesus had already made, and which, in the foregoing pages, we have humbly attempted to illustrate, that all the world, or the whole human race, were guilty before God; and that, in consequence of guilt, they were under sentence of condemnation, and thus existing in a state in which they had nothing before them but the prospect of utter, inevitable, and everlasting perdition. In one of these statements, however, he had communicated the glorious intelligence that the Son of God was sent into the world, and put to death in the flesh, in order “that whosoever

believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life,"—that "God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved." This was an intimation as to the object of the mission and death of the Son of God which was not less plain than it was gracious. It implied that, while his death was appointed as a sacrifice for sin, and with a view to the salvation of sinners, not one individual of all their countless generations should ever attain to salvation, except through faith in his name. It implied that all those who did not, and would not believe, should remain under condemnation and liable to perish,—not only exposed to the wrath of God, but exposed to it with all the aggravation of the paramount guilt of rejecting and despising that very deliverance which God himself had provided, pointed out, and pressed on their acceptance.

Now, as this was the object intended or the end proposed, so we are necessarily led to expect that, under the Divine administration, it would be the effect produced. On being informed, on the authority of God himself, that the Son of Man was lifted up, for the express and intimated purpose that all those who believe in him, and those only, should be delivered from perdition and inherit eternal life, two things are abundantly obvious. It is obvious, in the first place, that all who actually embrace this offer are then, in point of fact and on this account, exempted from condemnation; and, in the second place, that all who actually decline, and therefore slight the offer, remain under the condemnation of God. They remain under his condemnation, not merely in consequence of their previous guilt, but especially in consequence of that new and aggravated exhibition of unbelief and ungodliness by which they have shown

both how little concern they have felt for all their past offences, and how lightly they have estimated that unparalleled love which offered freely to forgive them for them all,—nay, offered to treat them afterwards as altogether righteous in his sight. In these momentous alternatives, there is presented to our contemplation a state of things particularly calculated to awaken and influence our minds. There is not the mere promulgation of an overture the most gracious, with an alternative the most awful, but the actual exhibition of the spiritual state and prospects of those who have implicitly and thankfully embraced the one, and of those who, spurning this, have madly and impiously presumed to abide and encounter the other.

In the present chapter, we have to contemplate the *condition* of the former,—of those who “have believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God.”

It is obvious that the *name* of the Son of God, as here used, is just another expression for the *Son himself*. This is a very frequent mode of expression in Scripture, when the Being spoken of is God, or any one of the persons in the Godhead. The expression itself, therefore, is a proof that the Saviour of the world is essentially Divine. The Psalmist tells us that he called on the name of the Lord; and yet when he records the language of his supplication, we find that he had directly called on the Lord himself—“O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul.” Psal. cxvi. 4. We find, indeed, that what, in the verse before us, is called believing in the *name* of the only-begotten Son of God, is, in the last verse of the chapter, simply called *believing on the Son*.

With this explanation, we proceed to consider the consequences of this believing, or the condition of those who really believe. In the verse immediately under

review, it is simply stated that they "are not condemned;" but from those immediately preceding, especially when taken in connection with the concluding verse, to which we have just alluded, it is evident that, besides being delivered from condemnation, they become heirs of eternal life. Here, then, we have presented to our special attention the two grand circumstances by which the condition of every real believer in the Son of Man—the only-begotten Son of God—is distinguished.

1. Immediately on his believing in him, the *sentence of condemnation* under which he had previously lived, is completely, and for ever, *annulled* and blotted out. Thorough as was his natural corruption, innumerable and aggravated as may have been his actual transgressions, and justly as any single one of them must have exposed him to the high and holy displeasure of God, yet no sooner has he believed in Him whom God "hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood," than he begins to partake of the blessedness of "the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered, and unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity." He does not become, on the instant, absolutely righteous or absolutely pure; but he has in himself a witness, the voice of which is becoming stronger and stronger, in declaring that sin shall not, at the future judgment, be allowed to rise up and condemn him. Absolutely righteous he cannot be, because the very offer of forgiveness which he has embraced, and the very act of forgiveness which has been performed in his behalf, prove him to be a sinner, though now a *pardoned* sinner; but, seeing that he is now converted as well as pardoned—seeing that he is now dead unto sin but alive unto God—he is no longer to be regarded, or dealt with, as a sinner in the eye of the Judge.

The believer is still liable, no doubt, to be tempted. He is certain in many things to offend, and in all things to come short of the glory of God. He needs, therefore, to be "renewed 'unto repentance," as often as he sins; but his sins are no longer in unison with the prevailing tendencies and affections of his heart, and the ordinary current of his thoughts. In his present, as well as in his previous state, sin is highly displeasing in the sight of God. Its tendency, too, is as hostile as ever to the best interests of the soul; but it is not allowed to have dominion over him. He is graciously rescued out of the snare; and his sufferings during his temporary declension, as well as the Divine love which has been manifested anew in his recovery, are rendered conducive to his hatred of sin in future, to his humility, his watchfulness, and his godly fear. It is to cases such as his that the Apostle refers, when he says, "If, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." God is in no shape reconciled to *sin*; nor can any one, under his government, enjoy any immunity in committing it. In one way or another, God will, in this present life, punish, or chastise even his own children for their sins; for He has threatened to "make their wickedness correct, and their backslidings reprove them." But then He does this in faithfulness rather than in anger. "Thou wast a God," says the Psalmist, "that forgavest them, though thou tookest vengeance of their inventions." He presents himself, in these cases, in the character of a righteous but reconciled Father, who is consulting and promoting their spiritual improvement and welfare, rather than in the character of an incensed and inexorable Judge. Treating them judicially—acting toward them in the capacity

of a judge—He graciously beholds them in the face of that anointed One whom they have embraced as the Lord their Righteousness, and in whom they have been accepted as righteous. They have been “accepted in the Beloved,” on whose account God sees, judicially, “no iniquity in Jacob, and no perverseness in Israel.”

In this way, believers are, in the truest sense of the word, exempted from condemnation. They are in such a relation to Him in whom they trust, that, were God publicly to pronounce on them, it would be a sentence of acquittal, nay approval; and, in so far as they are conscious of really receiving and confiding in the Saviour, they have a distinct intimation that such are God’s sentiments respecting them. It must be admitted, no doubt, that, notwithstanding his thus putting them in possession of a written pardon, as it were, signed and sealed, they are not exempted from all the present consequences of sin, or of his Fatherly displeasure. But they are left subject to such only of these consequences as may serve, under his gracious administration, to root sin, at length, out of their very nature, and to exercise those graces which are destined completely to occupy, in their hearts, the place of previous enmity and pollution. In the circumstance of their having already obtained mercy from God, as well as in the successive triumphs which they are enabled to acquire, they have an earnest or assurance of final and complete exemption from that condemnation which shall fall, with such awful emphasis, on all who have been the workers of iniquity, and who have refused to believe in the only begotten Son of God.

This earnest must necessarily become more and more distinct. The hope of believers must become clearer and clearer; their assurance stronger and stronger; and their peace and joy more and more perfect. “Being

justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." It is through faith that sinners become vested with an interest in the salvation which he offers. They are thus united to him, and enjoy the comfort of the solemn assurance that "there is no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus." If he is really believed in at all, it must be as the One who alone has the words of eternal life—as the One who offers, and is able, to save them; and the fact of their believing implies that they have thus obtained an earnest of salvation. They cannot really believe in him, without soon possessing and evincing some evidence of their faith, and an evidence which, from its very nature, may be expected to increase in strength and in value. It is not in the strength and enlargement of their faith that they are encouraged to seek their principal comfort, but in the righteousness and preciousness of the Saviour Himself; yet this experimental faith, as a new token by which he speaks to their minds, and embodies, as it were, the gracious overtures and intimations originally addressed to them in his word,—is calculated to invigorate their hope, to establish their tranquillity, and to enlarge their enjoyment. Their happy experience of "joy and peace in believing," instead of becoming itself a ground of confidence, only inspires them with greater and more exclusive confidence in Him who is emphatically styled their "peace," and through whom they "have received the atonement."

They have now the testimony of a good conscience, bearing witness, as God's enlightened and accredited interpreter, to the establishment of reconciliation between Him and their souls. They now no longer take occasion from their sins to fly off from God, or to fortify themselves in more reckless and systematic iniquity; nor do

they look on these sins with an eye of sullen despair. Conscious as they are of the remaining impurities and imperfections of their own nature, they will not allow themselves to doubt of the omnipotence of his grace or the faithfulness of his word. They see the necessity of their passing the time of their sojourning here in fear; and the very thing by which this holy principle is kept alive, is their knowledge that they have been "redeemed with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish, and without spot," and that he was manifested and put to death in the flesh, expressly and especially for all such as "believe in God that raised him up from the dead." They cannot doubt of their salvation, without first doubting, to some extent, of their faith. So long as they walk by faith—so long as it leads them again and again to the Saviour, and carries out toward him their fondest and devoutest affections—so long as it gives a manifest complexion to the whole current and tenor of their lives—so long, in short, as they feel that they have not forsaken him—nay, that their hearts cease not to follow hard after him,—they may rest assured that he has not forsaken them. They may, like Peter, have fallen into grievous sins; and none are so sensible as themselves of the guilt of their sins, or so unfeignedly and deeply grieved on account of them. But still, they do "not sorrow as others who have no hope;" for they reflect that they have "an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous." Even although they may sometimes but too certainly anticipate that urgent and dangerous temptations await them, still, the assurance which comforted Peter is repeated to every believer, and they cling affectionately to the Saviour who says, "But I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not."

2. Such is the condition of them that believe—so far, at least, as relates to their exemption from condemnation, and to the present peace of conscience which that exemption implies. Into their condition, however, there enters *another* most important circumstance. They have “passed from death unto life,” and they “have everlasting life.” They have actually entered into the various exercises and enjoyments of life spiritual; and they have thus, not only the assurance, but the foretaste of life eternal. It is not that their faith confers, or acquires by purchase, this inheritance; but it implies and evinces their covenanted possession of this precious acquisition, or gift. It is life spiritual during their present sojourn on the earth, and the same life continued, exalted, perfected, and perpetuated, in the world beyond the grave. It was this purified and blessed existence, and not merely deliverance from condemnation, that was held out to their acceptance, when the Son of God was preached to them. This was solemnly pledged to all who should believe in him, and therefore their belief becomes the satisfactory indication that they have, through the powerful and gracious influences of Him who made them the offer, actually chosen that blessed portion which shall never be taken away from them. It becomes the evidence, and in some sense the substance, of the things which are unseen and eternal. Faith, in short, as already shown, is one of the manifestations, though not the source, of that new life which is imparted to every regenerate soul.

When salvation through faith in the Son of God is preached to a sinner, it is the principle of faith itself which is called on or addressed; and although a sinner, in his natural state, is altogether destitute of a principle so holy, yet, as he is *bound* to believe and accept of the

offered Saviour—as faith can be made to spring up, at the very instant when it is called on, by that “God who quickeneth the dead, and calleth the things which be not as though they were”—so it is assuredly the first, or among the very first principles of the regenerate soul, which Divine grace brings into exercise. Thus it is, that, literally and without any figure of speech, they who believe, not only *shall* have, but *actually and already have*, the life which is offered them by the Redeemer. They are said to have it, not merely because they are certain to have it at last, or because they have been assured of their covenant title to it, but because they have actually entered on the possession of that part of the offered and entire inheritance, which falls to them in this present world. They have been released from the bondage of sin, and are now no otherwise prisoners than as “prisoners of hope”—having still more in anticipation than they as yet enjoy. They already partake of the Divine image, as man did at first, and are, in this sense, “partakers of the Divine nature.” They have already the sweet experience of God’s favour; they already feel the delight of his fellowship; and they have already consecrated their highest faculties to his service and glory. Nowhere but in this service do they find these faculties expand in their full amplitude and vigour—being ennobled, as it were, by the exercises in which they are engaged, and lifting themselves up, by a sort of holy emulation, to a measurement with the objects to which they are applied.

Those, then, who have become partakers of the precious faith which distinguishes the children of God, have entered on a new life. They walk in newness of life, and their life is a life of faith. The life which they live in the flesh, they live by the faith of the Son of God,

who loved them, and gave himself for them. This may truly be said of them, although much imperfection mingles with all that they do, and although, instead of coming up to the fulness of the requirements of God's most holy law, they do not come up even to the ideas or desires which they themselves entertain. They feel that they are unprofitable servants, and that the law of sin which is in their members, is still stronger, at times, than the law of sanctity which is in their minds. Such, however, is the law of their minds. They "delight in the law of God after the inward man." Now, the nature and dispositions of the children of God on earth, are not essentially different from the nature and dispositions of his children in heaven; but, in the one case, the same nature is more perfected than in the other, and its properties are exhibited under more favourable and congenial circumstances. One portion of God's spiritual family has been longer than another in the exercise and enjoyment of spiritual attributes; and many of them have been placed in a sphere peculiarly fitted for their cultivation and expansion. They are all alike his children; they all bear his image, more or less deeply and brightly expressed; they have all received and are animated by the Spirit of adoption.

It is not, be it observed, an essentially different life which these two sections of God's spiritual family possess—for it is "Christ that liveth" in each of them—but it is the same life under different circumstances. Take one of those on earth who have been unquestionably born again. Examine the ends at which he aims, the principles by which he is guided, the rules by which he walks, the motives by which he is impelled or restrained, and the leading example which he seeks to imitate. Inquire as to the society in which he delights, the subjects

on which he prefers to converse, the studies in which he loves to engage, and the particular enterprises or the ordinary pursuits which he is zealous to prosecute. Enter, if possible, into the sanctuary of his private thoughts and secret meditations; and, having done all this, then say if he does not aspire to have his conversation in heaven; and if, his life being hid with Christ in God, is not such as the saints around the throne would hail as the life of a younger brother, whom they are, by and by, to welcome "into everlasting habitations!" He is, at present, in a humbler sphere. He is repressed and kept down by the various incumbrances and distractions of mortality, and surrounded with manifold temptations. But let these be swept away and excluded—let him once be clothed with immortality—let him walk abroad in the full and glorious liberty of the sons of God—let him enter a scene in which there is nothing to allure, but everything to cheer and to delight him—let him dwell only among those who breathe under "new heavens," and inhabit "a new earth, in which dwelleth righteousness,"—and then it will be seen that, even while a sojourner here below, he has really been a partaker of eternal life. The state in which he enjoys it is not yet eternal. The earthly house of his tabernacle is not yet dissolved, and he himself is not yet dislodged from it; but he rejoices in the blessed hope that he has "a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." Truly his fellowship, even now, is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.

The truth is, it is not merely a future, but also, and in the first place, a *present* salvation which the Saviour has provided for us, and which is so graciously preached to us in the Gospel. "Now," says the Apostle, "Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salva-

tion." It was not merely to purchase for us exemption from future condemnation and eternal punishment, and to secure the final redemption of the body from the bondage of corruption, that the Son of man was lifted up on the Cross. These were, indeed, included among the important ends provided for in his death; but, as it was sin which had exposed us to perdition, our deliverance from the latter could not be effected, without provision being, at the same time, made for putting an end to the dominion of the former. It is manifest, accordingly, that both of these objects were alike precious in his sight. "He gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all *iniquity*, and *purify* unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." It is evident that the redemption here spoken of is a deliverance, not from the punishment, but from the power and pollution of sin. But it is, of course, in this present life if at all, that we can be redeemed or delivered from the iniquities which sin leads us to practise, and from the pollutions which its very existence implies. If, with sin unsubdued, and its pollutions unremoved from our souls, we were to pass into the eternal state, we should not only come into condemnation, but be excluded from the possibility of obtaining forgiveness.

Let us carefully remember, then, that while the Saviour died to redeem us from the wrath of God and the curse of his holy and righteous law,—while he shed his blood to expiate our guilt, and, by his obedience unto death, established a perfect and meritorious righteousness, sufficient to justify all the ungodly who believe in his name,—he did all this, not that we might continue in the practice and indulgence of sin, without having any longer to be afraid of its consequences. It is true that it is the hope of complete deliverance from wrath which

serves as a most powerful motive for believing in Him who was slain for us ; but unless this faith is such as to make us keep earnestly and habitually in view, one grand object here specially mentioned, on account of which he gave himself for us,—namely, to “redeem us from all iniquity,” it will profit us nothing. The salvation which Christ brings, and invites, nay, commands us to accept, is not only salvation from punishment, but from that which deserves it, that is, sin. The faith which really and intelligently embraces the one salvation, must likewise embrace the other. They are both held forth together ; but the *present* salvation,—redemption from the power and pollution of sin,—must first be shown to be embraced, and shown, by our *departing* from iniquity—by our denying or renouncing ungodliness and worldly lusts,—before there can be any evidence of our having obtained a personal interest in that which is more distant, though more comprehensive. Salvation consists partly in being restored to the image of God—in the perception and admiration of his attributes—in the participation of his favour—and in the enjoyment of communion with Him ; and, in so far as these things are concerned, all true believers—all the genuine children of God—may justly be regarded as already made partakers of the great salvation.

It is too plain to require any demonstration that the gracious offer which God makes to us in the Gospel, is an offer of present pardon and reconciliation ; and if we accept this offer,—or, in other words, if we believe in Him whom God has set forth and “exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour,”—we cannot fail to become partakers of the offered blessings. We cannot have reasonable and Scriptural evidence of our faith, without an immediate and corresponding evidence of our salvation, and a cor-

responding experience of joy and peace,—of “quietness and assurance for ever.” The man who is in the exercise of faith, is the man who thereby lays hold on eternal life,—who clings to the promise of that life of glory and felicity in heaven, of which he has already an earnest in the life of grace which he enjoys on earth. In this respect, he has, not only the promise and pledge of eternal life, but, in substance, “eternal life” itself “abiding in him.” The water of life which he drinks, is “in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.” With the pure in heart, he has already the blessedness of seeing God. Possessed of that genuine godliness which the Holy Spirit has wrought in his soul, he has the promise of the life which now is, and of that which is to come. Heaven is already begun. The kingdom of God is within him. Though man, who looks on the outward appearance, sees it not, Christ is in him the hope of glory. The ear of corn is already formed, and ere long to be fully unfolded, though as yet, being enclosed in the stalk, it is hid from common observation. His is still but the morning light, but it is shining more and more unto the perfect day,—the same in its nature at every stage of its progress, but not in its strength and effulgence. He has in him a life that cannot be extinguished, and a growth that cannot be fatally arrested. The plant of grace is one of God’s planting, and can neither be rooted up nor perish. It has sprung from an incorruptible seed, and contains within it, though unseen, the germ of immortality.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CONDITION OF UNBELIEVERS—CONDEMNED ALREADY.

JOHN III. 18.

WE come now to consider the condition of those who “have *not* believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” It is evident that the persons here spoken of are such as have had the opportunity of believing—by having seen or heard of him—and yet have withheld their belief. They are such as not only have not believed, but have refused to believe,—and such, therefore, as, instead of being without sin in this matter, “have no cloak for their sin.” Of these persons it is here intimated, not merely that they shall come into condemnation, but that they are “condemned already,”—and specially for this very reason, that they have not believed in God’s own Son, whom, out of his unparalleled love even to a guilty world, He gave up to save sinners from perdition, and bestow on them the blessings of everlasting life.

As born into the world, all men possess “an evil heart of unbelief;” and there occur many instances of their dishonouring and rejecting the testimony of God, previously to, and apart from, their discrediting or disregarding the record which He has given of his Son. Any of these instances is sufficient to condemn them; and all the children of men, long before they have denied or

rejected Christ, have come under condemnation, and exposed themselves to the wrath which is reserved for the workers of iniquity. But, if "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against *all* ungodliness and unrighteousness of men," how much more awfully must it be revealed against a sin which plainly intimates their determination to *continue* in their sins, and to set at defiance the wrath which he has revealed,—which intimates that, instead of hailing with gladness, and accepting with gratitude, the mercy which He offers, "for the remission of sins that are past," they are resolved, for the present at least, to reject that offer! This is to commit a sin still more heinous and insulting than any of which they had previously been guilty. This is a sin which unites and embodies all these sins in itself, and which adds incalculably to their criminality; without making them, in any degree, more alarmed for the consequences. It will be observed, accordingly, that it is to this particular and aggravated sin—to this concentration of their guilt—that our attention is here chiefly directed, as the ground of their condemnation. They were liable, on other grounds, to be condemned; but God had graciously intimated his readiness, for the sake of his Son, to depart from all these, and, on their believing in that Son, not only to cancel their guilt and exempt them from wrath, but to receive them into everlasting favour. He required of them simply to believe in, and accept of, that Divine Redeemer,—not as a performance or prerequisite by which they were to earn a title to the purchased blessing, but as that *without which* there could be no willingness to receive, and no actual reception of, the salvation which He had freely to bestow. Now, that they might have no excuse to make, and no plea to urge, for their neglecting or declining it, He solemnly

assured them, that they had only to ask,—earnestly and in the name of that Son himself,—in order to obtain power to believe in him, to the saving of their souls.

There are two ways, then, in which unbelief operates to the condemnation of sinners. It leaves them under the awful sentence which they have incurred for their other and previous sins; and it subjects them to a further and still more frightful manifestation of Divine wrath, on account of the special and audacious sin which is embodied in this unbelief itself.

1. God has expressly and solemnly denounced his wrath against every species, degree, and act of sin. He has emphatically recorded his determination that, “though hand join in hand”—though all the world form a combination to the contrary—“sin shall not go unpunished.” He will “by no means clear the guilty,”—without an atonement for their guilt. But this is the very thing which He himself has graciously provided. It is one which is sufficient to be a propitiation for the sins of the whole world, and one in which He invites and commands all sinners everywhere to put their trust. Having regard to this great sacrifice for sin, and to the infinite righteousness of the Redeemer in whose own person it was offered, God can, without any compromise of his authority, or any impeachment of his holiness, declare that He is reconciling sinners to himself. He is ready to acquit, and to receive back into his favour, all who put their faith in this statement, and who come, in consequence, to obtain these blessings from the hand of his mercy. The blessings, however, freely and richly as they are provided, cannot be actually obtained by any individual, except through faith in the only-begotten Son of God; and this is the very thing which sinners, in their

state by nature of enmity against God, neither possess nor desire.

It was from all that we have already spoken of, under the name of perdition, that the Son of God has come to save us ; but, as all who refuse to believe in him refuse, in fact, the salvation which he offers, it is impossible, while they do so, that they should ever escape from the doom which has been pronounced, and the wrath which abideth, on the children of disobedience. Food the most nourishing will not nourish, unless it is taken ; and medicine the most efficacious will not restore health, rectify disorder, or mitigate disease, unless it is used. The freshest and healthiest seed will not vegetate, unless it is sown, or placed in circumstances favourable to vegetation,—being supplied with its requisite proportion of air, moisture, heat, and light. The speediest and most certain means of escaping from a house which is on flames, will not avail the person who chooses to remain in the midst of them. A rope extended to a person who is drowning, will save him, if he lays hold on it ; but if he refuses to do this,—either through the vanity of displaying his own prowess, through his distrust of the individual who offers it, or through a reckless purpose to be rid of life itself,—then it will not save him, any more than will the air-bubbles that are rising and floating around him, or that are bursting almost as fast as they are formed. So, in a similar manner, will the rejection of the Saviour operate to the ruin of the souls of sinners. It will leave Divine law and justice to follow out their direct and awful course, and render it imperatively necessary for the Judge to carry into full and frightful effect that sentence of condemnation which has already been pronounced against their guilt.

2. But there is, as we have stated, another way in

which the denial or rejection of the Son of God operates to the ruin of immortal souls. It not only leaves them under sentence of condemnation for the manifold sins with which they were already chargeable, but it constitutes, *in itself*, a ground of condemnation, the most serious and insurmountable. All sin implies a disregard of the Divine authority, a disbelief, to some extent, of the Divine testimony, and even a defiance, so far, of the Divine power of retribution. When any one violates, for instance, the third commandment,—Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain,—he distinctly intimates, either that he does not believe that injunction to have proceeded from God ; or that he does not regard it as entitled to implicit obedience and respect ; or that he does not entertain the conviction that the threatened consequences of disobedience will ensue ; or that some means,—though he cannot say what,—may occur, by which they may be evaded ; or finally, that, if they become inevitable, they will not be heavier than he can venture to encounter, and may be able to sustain. The same may be said with respect to the violation of any other of the precepts or prohibitions of the Divine law. Nothing can be our duty, without its having the sanction of God's authority ; and, therefore, no duty can be neglected, without our virtually attempting to fix dishonour on that of the honour of which He cannot cease to be peculiarly jealous. The first and great transgression, which constituted and marked the commencement of human guilt, did not more certainly evince that man had not believed God to be what he really was, or his declarations to hold good, or his determinations to be unalterable, than every consequent transgression has evinced a similar misapprehension and unbelief.

This is most strikingly true, however, with respect to

the sin of rejecting the Lord's Anointed. Every communication which God has made to mankind since the Fall, has related, directly or indirectly, to this illustrious Person. Previously to that memorable event, man stood in no need of any separate and sacred writings to make him acquainted with the character and will of his Creator, to perpetuate the knowledge which he had originally obtained, or to remind him of the obligations under which he was placed, and of the duties which he was expected to discharge. In the exquisite structure, the endless variety, the admirable adaptations, and the marvellous beauty of the things around and above him,—in those faculties with which he himself was endowed for contemplation and reflection,—in that mysterious and authoritative law which was written on his heart,—in the manifestations of that providence which God exercised over all his diversified and manifold works,—and, especially, in that holy and intimate fellowship with which God condescended to honour him,—did man, during his holy and happy state, enjoy the most ample means of knowing all that it concerned him to know, and all that it became him to do. It was not till he had lost the image and fellowship of God—till he had ceased to resemble Him in knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness, that he needed a *special* revelation to enlighten him as to his duty, condition, and prospects, and, in particular, to instruct him as to the existence of mercy and the hope of forgiveness. It was not till then that he needed a written or outward revelation, to which he might constantly have recourse, and on which, amidst all the clouds of human ignorance, the mass of human error, and the conflicts of human opinion, there should not be permitted to be made any material, or any undetected and unrectified alteration. And when such a

revelation *was* graciously vouchsafed, what were, and what, time after time, have been, the principal subjects on which it has given forth its solemn utterance? In the reception which we give to these, we just indicate the reception which we give to the *Divine testimony*. The Scriptures, given by inspiration of God, contain the words and tidings of eternal life. They are able to make us wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus. The burden of the record is just this, "That God hath given to us eternal life, and that this life is in his Son."

Now, the sin of unbelief in regard to such a Saviour—one to whom God himself has, in so many ways and with such peculiar solemnity, borne testimony, cannot but be a sin of very great and special enormity. When we trace the history of Divine revelation,—when we consider the numerous and well-attested miracles which, on necessary occasions, have been wrought in its support,—when, along with these, we attend to the predictions put forth, at intervals more or less distant, and over a succession of ages,—when we reflect on the many minute, and as it were incidental, circumstances to which they have been found to refer,—when we examine and see in how signal and marvellous a manner some of the most important of them have been verified or fulfilled by the events,—and when we attend, in particular, to those which relate to the person, character, ministry, sufferings, death, and resurrection of the Saviour, to the nature of his kingdom, the outpouring of his Spirit, and the progress of his Gospel,—it is impossible for us not to acknowledge that, of all the sins which men have committed against God, there is none which involves a larger measure of presumption and unbelief than the sin of rejecting Him whom God has owned and honoured as

the Son of his love. It amounts to a refusal to believe in God himself. "And he that believeth not God, hath made Him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son."

Nor is this all. This daring unbelief not only impeaches the veracity of "Him who cannot lie," but it slights his mercy, and challenges his vengeance. It meets Him with the highest insult, at the very moment when He is advancing, toward the guilty outcast, with the overtures of reconciliation and love! Instead of bespeaking either a sense of sin, a pang of remorse, an emotion of grief, or a touch of contrition, it betrays the utmost arrogance in guilt, and the utmost indifference both to the consequences of rebellion, and to the graciousness and the costliness of the Redeemer's sacrifice. The sin of those who will not believe in his name, not only subjects them, like every other sin, to merited condemnation, but it involves the peculiarly fearful condemnation which is due to their impiously rejecting the only refuge from infinite wrath and unutterable wretchedness, that Heaven itself has had to reveal. As if the guilt of their other and previous sins were not sufficiently great, or the punishment they incurred not likely to be sufficiently severe, this daring impiety comes in supplement to their ungodliness, and asks that they be not admitted to mercy or visited with salvation! This is a form of unbelief and impiety of which even devils have not been guilty; for those unbelievers who are here spoken of, reject an offer of mercy and salvation that devils never received, and therefore never had an opportunity of rejecting.

This sin is justly represented as the chief ground on which unbelievers are condemned. It had been easier to overlook all their other sins than this. In a certain sense, indeed, these others *had* all been overlooked.

Notwithstanding all these, God had offered freely to forgive them ; and He only required that they should cordially accept, and express their acceptance of, this forgiveness, by believing in Him whom He had ordained to "bear our sins in his own body on the tree." Than this unfeigned, nay, earnest and affectionate offer, there could not be any stronger or more glorious manifestation of his grace. On the other hand, however, in order to vindicate his awful and inviolable justice in condemning them, there needs not—nay, there cannot exist—any heavier charge or fuller evidence against them than the *rejection* of such an offer. They are condemned already, and with special reference to their unbelief in rejecting Him who came to save sinners from condemnation. The height of their guilt consists in their setting both sin and salvation at nought. It appears, not merely by their flying in the face of God's authority, but in scoffing at the overtures of his mercy and his love. It appears, not merely by their rising up against a Sovereign, a Benefactor, and a Father, but by their disdainfully and audaciously tearing in pieces and trampling under foot, the deed of indemnity and the pledge of affection, which bore his own signature, was stamped with his own seal, and sent to them by the hands of his own Son. It appears, not merely by their running against the thickest bosses of Jehovah's buckler, but in refusing, even when his glittering sword is mercifully stayed, to ask their life by kneeling at his feet,—nay, in presumptuously and impiously striking aside the golden sceptre of peace, with which his own right hand and his holy arm would extend to them salvation.

There cannot be anything more deplorable than this condition of unbelievers. Abiding in unbelief, they abide under wrath. They are not only without eternal

life, but without the slightest prospect of it; because they are entirely without any share or symptom of life spiritual. "He that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." Unbelievers may *cease* to be unbelievers; but, so long as they continue to be what they are, they cannot be saved. Awful indeed is their condition. Such is their infatuation, as well as their unbelief, that they refuse to listen to the most solemn and repeated warnings to flee from the wrath to come. The only real sacrifice for sin is that in which they have refused, and will not be persuaded to trust. The only avenue by which they could have been rescued from condemnation on account of their other and previous sins, is that which, by a new and aggravated iniquity, they have shut up against themselves or refuse to enter. There has come, from the immediate presence of the Most Excellent Majesty, one who is the herald of pardon and the harbinger of peace—and they treat Him as an impostor, a malefactor, and a blasphemer! Their dismal prospects can be brightened only by the death-blow or extinction of that principle of enmity and unbelief which has possession of their hearts. Should this principle continue there—and if it does, it cannot but become more inveterate—it is easy to foresee the fearful and calamitous issue. Imagination, however, cannot conceive, and Scripture itself does not reveal, except obscurely, as if through ominous and appalling shadows, the terrible miseries which that issue must involve.

It is comparatively only a small part of the sentence against unbelievers that may fall to be executed in this present life. They cannot fail, nevertheless, to meet with sundry not ambiguous intimations, that the only thing which prevents them from being, even here, com-

pletely wretched, is just that they are still within reach of those objects which minister gratification to such desires and affections as *they* are capable of entertaining. But, let them once be entirely separated from these objects—let created things be no longer permitted to exclude the thought of the Omnipresent Creator—let the gratifications of sin have no longer an opportunity of banishing from their minds the dreadful but unvarying utterances of the sacred law by which all of them are forbidden and condemned—and then shall agony indescribable become the unmingled and inexhaustible portion of their undying souls. What a brief space, what a miserable imposition, between these souls and the full cup of bitterness and wrath! They are like criminals lurking in the dark, or seeking to escape in disguise, but who, in a moment, may plunge into the gulf or the pit, if they do not, in their flight, fall over the precipice. They are seeking to shroud themselves under a thick, impenetrable cloud; but it will prove, ere long, to be the birth-place of the lightning, and the secret place of thunder. They will, by and by, be calling on the rocks and the mountains to fall on them, and cover them from the wrath of the Lamb, whose love was often urged on them in vain; but this also will be in vain, for, at that moment, the elements shall melt with fervent heat—the earth shall be burnt up—the heavens themselves shall pass away with a great noise—and “where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?”

CHAPTER XIII.

SPECIAL REASONS WHY UNBELIEVERS ARE CONDEMNED.

JOHN III. 19, 20.

IN the previous chapter, our attention has been earnestly directed to our Lord's statement as to the condemnation of those who do not believe in the only begotten Son of God. Their condemnation he represents as resting, not merely on the ground of their other and antecedent sins, or their sins in general, but more particularly on the very sin of this their unbelief. This certainly implied that it is a sin of no ordinary guilt. In the next statement which he makes, and which we have now to consider, he points out that guilt more distinctly, by referring to the practical ungodliness in which this unbelief has its origin, or with which, at least, it is peculiarly and invariably connected, and to the special circumstances under which it has been exhibited. "And this," says he, "is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." From the connection of the passage, it is evident that he means to say, not only that men are condemned chiefly on the ground of their unbelief, but that the reason of this is just because, in their case, it has proceeded from an *unwillingness* to believe—from an attachment to the darkness which concealed and favoured their sinful

practices, and an aversion to the light by which they were exposed and reprov'd.

The special reasons why unbelievers are declared to be condemned, may be illustrated under the following sections.

SECTION I.—*That the Light is come into the World.*

The first thing to be considered regarding this is, what is to be understood by the Light here spoken of. So far as has been recorded, natural light was the first product of creation; and of all material or physical existences it is one of the most important and remarkable. Its properties and laws are singularly interesting and beautiful. It is self-evidencing, so that it cannot but make itself known. Wherever it is present, it is visible. It is also most diffusive. Wherever it exists, it sheds itself all around. From every centre in which the hand of the Creator has assigned it a place, its rays are issuing, in all directions, toward the utmost boundaries of space. It brings into view, moreover, and forces into visibility every object, however minute, on which its radiance falls. "Whatsoever is," shone upon, or "made manifest is light." It is in this way that it has been the medium of the most sublime and wonderful discoveries. Science, which has untwisted the radiant threads of colour that are hid in every single ray of light, owes to it some of the most illustrious of its triumphs. Light is the great revealer of secrets—penetrating the otherwise unapproachable depths of the firmament, and subjecting to the most piercing scrutiny the minutest atoms of inanimate matter, and the microscopic organs and textures of vegetable or of animal life. It is the ever wakeful and incorruptible witness to the

wisdom, resources, and beneficence of its Divine and glorious Creator. It is, along with its other properties, a substance—if substance it may be called—of transcendent purity. It is altogether incapable of contracting the slightest taint of anything impure. It comes into contact with objects the most offensive and loathsome—it slumbers on the corruption of the grave—it pervades the atmosphere which is loaded with contagion, and fetid with the exhalations of pestilence and death—but, for all this, it remains in all its essential purity, and returns or flies swiftly forward on its blessed and joyous errands, “with healing in its wings.”

The element to which we have thus adverted, has been chosen and sanctioned by Him who, by the first act, apparently, of creative power, called it into existence, as an appropriate emblem of himself. “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.” He is represented, in his own word, as “dwelling in light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see.” Most naturally the same emblem is employed in speaking of Him who was to be “the image of the invisible God.” By one of the most distinguished of the ancient prophets, the promised Messiah is spoken of as “a light to the Gentiles;” and the last of them, toward the close of his predictions, proclaims his coming under the title of “the Sun of righteousness.” When, after a long interval, prophecy is resumed, we find the father of the Baptist adopting similar language, and speaking of One who was “to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.” Of the Baptist himself it is emphatically said, “He was not *that* Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.”

These references, presented to us in so striking a series, and pointing so distinctly to the same individual, render it abundantly evident that the Light spoken of in the passage which we are now considering, is none other than the Son of God, or God manifest in the flesh.

This is He of whom it said, "In him was life; and the life was the light of men," and who himself has said, once and again, "I am the light of the world." He is the Creator of the *natural* light of the world, for "by him God made the worlds;" and "without him was not anything made that was made." He is also the fountain of *intellectual* light. He has imparted, both to men and angels, the highest and noblest faculties and powers of thought by which they are distinguished. The most acute, penetrating, and capacious of these faculties are furnished by him with ample scope for their exercise, in their researches into the mysteries of his works at large, and in the investigation of those still sublimer mysteries of redemption into which, as expressly intimated, "the angels desire to look." We receive with gratitude, and listen, with profound admiration, to the truths which are gathered, and the discoveries which are achieved in the fields of scientific pursuit. We delight to think that the intellect of man has been able to unfold to us so much of the mind, of the ways, and of the works of God. We are gratified to think of the successful application of so noble an instrument to the study and understanding of so noble and boundless a subject. We admire at once the telescope and the lofty heavens which it sweeps and penetrates. We are filled with wonder when we carefully examine the structure and properties of the human eye, as well as when we look up to the azure depths of the firmament, or gaze upon its myriads of living but unapproachable lights and constellations. In all this,

however, we ought devoutly to remember, that both the gazers and the splendid scenery on which their vision is feasted, are the workmanship of Him who was "with Jehovah in the beginning of his way, before his works of old." He has adapted—beautifully adapted—the one to the other. He has both imparted the faculties, and furnished the subjects on which they are to be employed. He enables us to fathom certain deep things around us, yet leads us ever to perceive certain deeper things which we cannot fathom. The more that we know of his wonders, the more are we impressed with the number and magnitude of those which we cannot know. The more we search, and that successfully, into his works, the more are we convinced that *He* is unsearchable—that none "can find out the Almighty unto perfection."

But even this is not the highest sense, nor the sense chiefly intended, when it is stated that the Light is come into the world. The darkness which the Son of God came into the world to dispel, was not so much intellectual as spiritual darkness. It was the darkness which had been caused by the original entrance of sin, which had long brooded over the nations, and in which they were still sitting, when his arrival was announced. The announcement was accompanied with the appropriate symbol of the *glory* of the Lord, which shone round about the shepherds to whom it was made. It was a similar emblem, that of a mild resplendent "star," by which the Wise men from the East were guided to the place where the infant Saviour lay. And so appropriate was such an emblem—nay, such seems to have been the satisfaction with which He himself regarded it, that, in the very close of his communications to his Church, and through her to the world—even long after his glorious exaltation to the right hand of God the Father—He styles

himself "the bright and morning Star." The manifestation of Him of whom these are the divinely appointed emblems, was specially intended for the enlightening of the world in those things which it had the greatest need to know, and yet about which its indifference was as great as its ignorance. The world had been sinking deeper and deeper in superstition, idolatry, and ungodliness. In some countries, it is true, literature and refinement, an ambitious and vain philosophy, along with the most enthusiastic and successful cultivation of the fine arts, had been carried to the highest perfection; but vice was still triumphant. "Darkness covered the earth, and gross darkness the people." The mass of society was internally and utterly corrupt, whatever were, in some departments, the proprieties of its outward aspect. It resembled the smooth surface of a stagnant lake,—reflecting, at a distance, the light of the sun, while its waters are strongly impregnated with all that is noisome, and are sullenly settling down, over many objects of hideousness and corruption.

Now, when the Son of God, when God manifest in the flesh, is He who is so appropriately denominated the Light, it is doing more than stating the *fact* of their unbelief, to say that men do not believe in him. It is impossible to reject One to whom this title so justly and eminently applies, without evincing the *guilt* of such a rejection. The natural light of day is not more directly its own evidence, to all who open their eyes to receive it, than the glorious Person here spoken of is qualified and ordained to be his own witness. The rays which are reflected, and the various tints of colour which are exhibited, by the innumerable objects on which the light of day is shed, do not more clearly bear testimony to its existence than the manifold truths and blessed tidings of

inspiration bear testimony to Him who is the Life and the Light of the world. Himself the Light, he imparts light, not only by the glorious attributes which he personally exhibits, but also by the divine intelligence which he brings, and the glorious truths which he unfolds. In himself he has furnished the illustration of many remarkable types, and the fulfilment of many most important prophecies. Those who have seen Him, have, in a certain sense, seen the Father. The minds of those, on the other hand, who believe not, have been blinded by the god of this world, "lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them!" Believers "show forth the praises of Him who hath called them out of darkness into his marvellous light;" and thus they who "once were darkness," become "the children of light," or are themselves "light in the Lord." To them, many things which had been previously wrapt up in mystery, or partially revealed in symbols and shadows, have been plainly and fully made known. In this way, as well as by the Divine and surpassing wisdom with which he spake, the thorough insight which he shewed as to what was, at any time, passing in the hearts of men, and the astonishing miracles which he wrought,—was it clearly proved, to all but the most blinded and unbelieving, that Jesus was a Teacher come from God, and that God was with him.

Never did any one possess such ample credentials, or shew so good a right to be publicly believed on. All preceding prophets had been chiefly occupied in speaking of *his* character, office, and endowments, and in preparing the world for his appearing. They had condescended on the minutest particulars, so that, when he actually appeared, there might be the fullest means of marking

the fulfilment of what had been foretold, and of detecting any thing—had any thing existed in him—which did not exactly correspond with what had been declared to belong to him. The false Christs who rose up, about the time of his manifestation and after his death, while they evinced the general and well-founded impression, that the fulness of the times had come, when the true Christ might justly be expected,—demonstrated conclusively, by the *result* of their impostures, that that was precisely the era when none but the very Christ—the true Messiah—could permanently retain the confidence of any considerable proportion of his countrymen, or of mankind. Manifold and minute were the delineations and disclosures of the Scriptures respecting this illustrious Person; and manifold needed to be the points of correspondence between him and these delineations. Instead, however, of dreading or evading the strictest inquiry and the most rigid comparison, Jesus exhorted and entreated both the people and their rulers—biassed though they were against him—to search those Scriptures; because, as he well knew, they gave him the whole, the venerable, and, what should have been, the irresistible force of their testimony.

And as all his pretensions were, from the first, subjected to the closest investigation, under a light which allowed nothing to be concealed, so he himself diffused a light before which all obscurity disappeared. It was expected of the Messiah that, on the subject of religion, he would “tell us all things;” and what, in point of fact, did Jesus leave untold? Did he leave any room for uncertainty as to the infinite and immutable holiness of God? as to the guilt and the perishing condition of men? as to God’s willingness, nay, purpose, to show mercy? or as to his insisting, nevertheless, on an expiation for

the sins of those on whom mercy was to be bestowed? Did he leave any doubt as to a future state and judgment? as to that personal holiness without which no man shall see the Lord? or as to the Divine and gracious agency by which alone the souls of men can be prepared for again enjoying his presence and beholding his glory? Has he not "brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel?" Did he not begin his ministry by vindicating and magnifying the Law, every requirement of which he had undertaken to fulfil, and the heaviest of whose penalties he was appointed, on behalf of sinners, to endure? Did he not, as a Teacher sent from God, answer every honest inquiry, and solve every reasonable question that was proposed to him? And when captious objections or ensnaring questions were put,—when insidious attempts were made to draw him into unprofitable discussion,—were not his answers always such as made the hearers marvel at his readiness and his wisdom? and such as to show that the motives of the party were fully detected, and that, at last, no man durst, in this way, ask him any more questions?

But in contemplating and estimating the Light that is come into the world, it is necessary that we should think, not only of that which flowed more immediately from the Saviour himself and his personal ministry, but also of that which was diffused through the teaching, example, and sufferings of his inspired Apostles. He left to them the fuller elucidation of many important truths and doctrines, after they were endued with power from on high, by the special and abundant outpouring of the Holy Spirit. In a few remarkable and well-known instances, he gloriously revealed himself to some of them, long after he had been exalted to the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens; and to John, the honoured

survivor of them all, he gave a special commission in these memorable words: "Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter." The great enlargement of their views, in several particulars, which the Apostles exhibit in their writings, as compared with the partial and even mistaken ideas which, in some things, they betrayed during his life, and up to the day of his ascension,—clearly shows how truly they had afterwards, according to his promise, been filled with the Holy Ghost, and how eminently they had profited by the inspiration of that Heavenly Teacher. On every point connected with "the redemption that is in Christ Jesus," they have conveyed to us the fullest and clearest information. They have spoken most profoundly and yet most plainly on subjects on which neither fishermen nor philosophers could have spoken at all, unless they had been instructed by the Wisdom which is from above. They have left nothing in obscurity which it seemed meet to Him who made them his ambassadors, to reveal,—nothing but what was either beyond the grasp of our minds or nowise essential to the attainment of the salvation which they preached. They were all, with a single exception or two, not only plain, but uneducated men. Yet they enter on the profoundest subjects connected with religion, under a calm and manifest consciousness that their "speech and preaching were not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." The profoundness of the truths which they handle is not greater than the simplicity of their language. If there are things in their writings hard to be understood, it is only because to men, in their present state, no language could make them plainer.

How nobly and confidently, yet modestly, do they say,—“By manifestation of the truth we commend ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God. But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” They know whom they had believed, and to whom they had committed the keeping and salvation of their souls. And not more confident were they in his power, his faithfulness, and his love,—not greater was their glorying in his Cross,—than was their zeal to testify the Gospel of the grace of God, and their readiness to spend and be spent for the sake of those to whom they had been commissioned to proclaim it.

On what department, then, of all the subjects which it concerns us most to know, does not the Light that has come into the world, abundantly shine? It has been lifted up on the Law of God—unfolding at once our duties and our sins. It has been lifted up on our state and prospects as sinners,—on the ways of God and the wonders of his love. It has penetrated the deepest and the most secret recesses of our hearts. It has held up a lighted torch to the dark visage of every thought and purpose of wickedness. It has also irradiated the valley of the shadow of death, and forced its way into the chambers of the grave. It has enabled us, by faith, to behold, through the crystal gates of heaven, the Redeemer in his glory, with the saints around his throne. It has opened a faint but lurid glimmering over the fearful gulf which leads down to the abodes of guilt, wretchedness, and despair!

How just a ground of condemnation, then, is it, that the Light thus manifested is shunned, slighted, and hated!

Unbelief here is no mere speculative or harmless error. It is not the mistake of an honest and unbiassed mind. With such an amount of unexceptionable and precious evidence, there cannot but be an evil heart of unbelief in withholding the assent of the mind. The thorough examination of evidence so full, so plain, so practical, and so accessible, if conducted with earnestness, impartiality, perseverance, and humble prayer, can scarcely, if ever, fail to produce a firm and distinct conviction of the truth and justice of the Saviour's claims. But, if the examination of the evidence is not of this description, the result may indeed be expected to be different,—for it is only “if any man will do the will of God”—as far as he is already aware of it—that “he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God.” Landing thus in unbelief, however, the result will demonstrate, not the inadequacy of the proof, but the unfairness of the procedure, and the perverseness of the spirit in which it has been canvassed. Men who desire and are resolved still to walk in darkness, cannot be supposed to welcome or accept the Light. “Go unto this people and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see and shall not perceive: for the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.”

SECTION II.—*That men loved the darkness rather than the light.*

The language in which this circumstance is here stated does not imply that the light met with *some* portion of their affectionate regard. The word *rather*, in

many instances, does not intimate comparison and preference, as the following examples will abundantly prove. "The chief priests," we are told, "moved the people that they should *rather* release Barabbas unto them,"—that is to say, Barabbas *instead* of Christ,—Barabbas exclusively; for, in regard to Christ, they all cried out, "Let him be crucified!" In like manner, the Apostle says, "Let him that stole steal no more; but *rather* let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good;" "and have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but *rather*,"—that is, on the contrary, "reprove them." Here it is obvious that his condemnation of theft, and of every work of darkness, must have been most unqualified. In the passage before us the word is evidently used in precisely the same manner, not as intimating that unbelievers reject and shun the light, merely because they prefer the darkness, but because they dislike the former altogether, and feel that the latter only is their proper region, and their proper element. These things, indeed, are as opposite as are Christ and Belial; and the one cannot be loved without the other being hated.

This statement of our Lord, that men have loved the darkness, and not the light, may be illustrated in the case of the Jews, in the case of those who are either the votaries of superstition or the disciples of a philosophy falsely so called, and in the case of all merely nominal Christians.

1. It may be stated, in the first place, that the Jews loved the darkness, and not the light. The Evangelist had no sooner remarked, in the first chapter, that the light was in the world, that the world was made by Him, and that, in its alienated and degenerate state the world knew Him not, than he particularized the guilt

and the unbelief of his countrymen. "He came unto his own, and his own received Him not." It was to those who were possessed of the authentic writings of all the prophets who had spoken of Him, that He was sent. It was to the house of Israel that He first submitted his claims, as well as promulgated his Gospel; because it was to them that the amplest means had been vouchsafed of forming, with respect to these claims, a sound and accurate judgment. They enjoyed, in a special manner, the benefit of that light which prophecy had shed around the path and the person of the Messiah. Having thus clearer manifestations made to them than to others, of the Divine attributes, as well as of the character of the predicted Messiah himself, they were better qualified, in these respects, to judge of Him when He came, and to discover whether or not his works were wrought in God. Notwithstanding all these advantages, however, they rejected Him, not because He failed to fulfil what the prophets had foretold of Him, or because any of his mighty works or peculiar doctrines were unworthy of God, but because they shut their eyes to the light, and because, having adopted, concerning the Christ, unauthorized notions of their own, they were determined to walk in the sight of their own eyes, and in the desire of their own hearts.

What was it but a disregard and aversion to the light that made them fall into the egregious inconsistency of reproaching and insulting the Baptist on account of his austere life and sequestered habits, and, at the same time, of reproaching and calumniating the Son of Man because he partook of the innocent enjoyments of society? "John the Baptist," said our Lord, "is come neither eating bread nor drinking wine; and ye say, 'He hath a devil.' The Son of Man is come eating and

drinking; and ye say, 'Behold a gluttonous man, and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners!' But Wisdom is justified of all her children." Multitudes could attest that Jesus had, on two different occasions, abundantly fed several thousands by the miraculous multiplication of a few loaves and fishes with which their meal began. Notwithstanding, however, this well attested fact, his countrymen would not allow that the individual who had power to do this could have any authority for plucking a few ears of corn on the Sabbath day, and rubbing them in his hand, in order that he might relieve his own hunger, and that of his disciples. In the estimation of these blinded countrymen, too, he incurred the charge of profaning the Sabbath, because on that day he had miraculously made the lame to walk, and the blind to see. In this instance they thought him worthy of death for employing, in a work of mercy on one of their fellow creatures, not a fiftieth part of the time which they, on the same day, would have bestowed to save the life, or even to supply the food, of one of their domestic animals.

When Jesus cast the evil spirit out of the man who was both blind and dumb, the people were so much amazed at the miracle, and so struck with the dignity of its Author, that they exclaimed, "Is not this the Son of David?" But when the Pharisees, who were the great leaders and organs of public opinion, heard of it, they said, "This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub, the prince of the devils." Even they, indeed, did not attempt to deny or discredit the fact of the miracle, but, rather than acknowledge that he performed it through the power of the Spirit of God, they involved themselves in the grossest absurdity and contradiction, as if Satan had entered into league with him to destroy

his own kingdom ; and as if, supposing this had been the case, the same thing might not, with as much justice at least, have been alleged with respect to the exorcisms practised by their own disciples. On more occasions than one he reduced them to the most perplexing dilemma ; and yet they would neither acknowledge their own ignorance nor listen to him for instruction. They were right in regarding the Christ as the Son of David ; but when he asked them then to explain how David, in the Spirit, called him Lord, they could not answer him a word. Yet these were the persons who, by their confident but partial interpretations of Scripture, justified themselves in rejecting the claims of Jesus of Nazareth to be the Christ. They not only acknowledged his miracles, but, by a strange and impious infatuation, they made them the ground of their violent proceedings against him. "What do we?" said they, "for this man doeth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him." When they came to him with an insidious question respecting tribute, he had exhorted them to render unto Cæsar the things which were Cæsar's, and unto God the things which were God's ; and yet, at his mock trial, when Pilate, convinced of his innocence, was disposed to release him, the Jews cried out, saying, "If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend."

In their treatment of him, when they led him away to be crucified, and, in particular, while he hung upon the Cross, some of the most minute and striking predictions of their acknowledged Scriptures were fulfilled. These furnished evidence the most remarkable in behalf of Him whom they rejected. They mocked and derided him in the latest and deepest of his agonies. "He saved others," said they insultingly ; "himself he cannot save."

If he be the King of Israel, let him come down from the Cross and we will believe him. He trusted in God ; let Him deliver him now, if He will have him : for he said, I am the Son of God." In this way, did they scoff at his claim of Divinity, and his confidence in God, his Heavenly Father. Ah ! what if he could have been prevailed on to meet their challenge!—to manifest to them his power at the expense of leaving the sins of the world unexpiated, and to obtain an unprofitable triumph over their unbelief, by allowing the powers of darkness to triumph eternally over both himself and them ! But would even his descent from the Cross—*would* it indeed have compelled their belief ? Why not, then, the equally astonishing miracles of his life ? Nay, a still fairer trial was given them. He would not, even at this awful crisis, abandon the work which he had left the bosom of the Father to accomplish ; but, having finished transgression, and, by his obedience unto death, brought in an everlasting righteousness, he gave to them and to the world the highest proof of his omnipotence, by his rising again from the dead. He did inconceivably more than they challenged him to do ; showing that though he "became obedient unto death," and was appointed to die, neither death nor the grave had any dominion over him. And yet, notwithstanding the glorious and resistless way in which he demonstrated himself to be "the Son of God," and "the Prince of life," and, in a loftier sense than ever, "the Light of the world,"—they continued just as obstinate in their unbelief, and as rooted in their antipathy, as before ! It is impossible to think of these different circumstances in the conduct of the Jews, and not to perceive that they furnish the most melancholy but striking illustration of the statement in

the verse before us, that "men have loved the darkness instead of the Light."

2. Of this statement, another illustration is furnished in the case of those, on the one hand, who have been the votaries of a false religion, or of those, on the other, who, even in religious matters, disclaim all guidance but that of unassisted reason.—The error and the guilt of the Jews in rejecting the Gospel, consisted, not in adhering to their own Scriptures as divine, and therefore infallibly true, but in allowing their vanity and earthly-mindedness to make them misinterpret them; and in then adhering to their earthly and mistaken views. Their religion, apart from its mere forms and ceremonies, was what no authority could abrogate, for it was the Gospel itself, less fully unfolded; and, had it not been on the authority of the very God of Israel that these forms and ceremonies were declared to be abolished, that people would have been worthy of high commendation for clinging to them with the fondest attachment. The evil and the iniquity of their conduct consisted in clinging as obstinately to their own mistaken notions as they strenuously did to the truths with which these notions were blended.

But the Jews were the only people on the face of the earth who ever had such a palliation as this for their unbelief. No other nation or tribe possessed any authentic scriptures, their attachment to which, either in whole or in part, might explain, though it could not justify nor even excuse, their refusal to embrace the fully substantiated doctrines of Christ and his Apostles. Yet the Gentiles, or Heathens, if they did not, as uniformly and universally as the Jews, reject the Gospel that was preached to them, did, in the great majority of cases, reject it; and, for this rejection, the same explanation is

to be given as before—that they loved the darkness and not the Light. Christ crucified was not only “to the Jews a stumbling-block,” but “to the Greeks foolishness;” and, even in the age of miracles, it was the observation of an Apostle, that “not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble” had listened to the call, and accepted the offers of the Gospel. Perhaps all religions contain some things which are founded in truth, yet it must imply a melancholy perverseness of mind to refuse, for the sake of these things, to embrace a religion which is “truth” itself “without any mixture of error.” It is sufficiently plain, however, that the occasional truths which are blended with false religions have had little share in making their votaries so obstinately adhere to them. This adherence must receive a different explanation. There is one thing in which all false religions agree—their being more or less *congenial* to the natural corruption of the human heart, because in that very corruption many of their tenets and usages have had their origin. While the Gospel teaches the doctrine of that corruption, it teaches also how the evil itself is to be counteracted and finally rooted out. Other religions, without openly approving of it, in many instances appeal to its tendencies and cravings, and thus commend themselves to the acceptance of a world which “lieth in wickedness.” The blessed Gospel seeks to mitigate and extinguish the disease from which false religions have partly sprung, and which their exercise and exhibition serve, not only to diffuse more widely, but to render more virulent and fatal.

Although all heathen and unenlightened nations have been descended from a family that was possessed of an express revelation from God, yet we know, on the testimony of revelation itself, that “they did not like

to retain God in their knowledge," but "changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator,—changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things." If, among the Jews, the tradition of the doctors, priests, and scribes had rendered the word of God of none effect, much more might it be supposed that, among the distant descendants of Noah, the second father of the earth's inhabitants, the sacred truths which he had but orally communicated would, in the course of time, be in a great measure obliterated; and that different systems and forms of heathenism would speedily arise, shaping themselves to the particular circumstances and character of different nations. The beings whom the heathen have deified—the imaginary gods whom they have served and worshipped—have been altogether such as themselves,—surpassing them in little else than in the power of doing what they were naturally inclined to do. They have been a sort of idols formed out of personifications of human passions, and who have therefore very amply received the hearty tribute which these passions were prepared to offer. Guilt, ignorance, and fear have presided in fashioning, and clothing with suitable attributes, the objects of superstitious idolatry. Falsehood and fraud, robbery and revenge, drunkenness and licentiousness, no less than truth, justice, temperance, and chastity, have had their presiding divinities; and, in ages and countries very distant from each other, the most abominable obscenities, the most disgusting impurities, and the most revolting barbarities, have been found to enter into the celebration of the highest solemnities of their horrid worship. We have only to reflect, therefore, on this common property of all false religions, namely,

their being so thoroughly in unison with the corruption of the human heart, in our degenerate state as fallen creatures,—on the origin which they have had,—and on the modifications which they have received, always in farther adaptation to the existing state of society,—in order to perceive, that these religions have never been, and never will be, renounced for the true, except in connection with a process by which our nature is, to that extent at least, purified and renewed.

The most cultivated among the heathen had no objection to rank with their own divinities the God of the Christians. They built to Him an altar, under the title of “The unknown God,” whom therefore they ignorantly worshipped. But no sooner was that God *preached* to them,—no sooner did the preacher denounce their superstition, and insist, on the authority of this very Being, that they should worship and serve *Him* only,—and no sooner did he lay before them the momentous doctrines of the resurrection and the judgment to come, than “some mocked, and others,” like the guilty Felix, and with an evident desire to be rid of the subject, “said, We will hear thee again of this matter.” In short, though “certain men clave unto the Apostle and believed,” and one of them, a member of one of their most celebrated courts, yet the generality treated him as a contemptible babbler. Thus did they plainly evince that though they were miserably ambitious to multiply their idols, and ready to worship they knew not what, they were impatient of “reproof, and of instruction in righteousness.” Their language to the only true God was virtually, “Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways.” In modern times, too, the experiment has been made on a large scale, with heathen and unenlightened communities; and though there have been many cheering and striking in-

stances of the power of the truth, there have, alas! been many, many more, of the melancholy predominance of darkness, superstition, and delusion. "The light" is sent and "shineth in the darkness; and the darkness comprehendeth," or admitteth, "it not."

It is not, however, among the votaries of reigning superstitions only, that the despisers and disbelievers of the truth, whether educated or uneducated, are to be found. There were many among the philosophers of ancient times who were more or less fully aware of the absurdity and the baselessness of the popular religions, who, instead of seriously and humbly inquiring into the truth of a religion which put forth such claims, and made such proposals as the Gospel did, contemptuously turned from it, as no more rational and no better supported than the rest. With a precipitancy which did little honour to their philosophy, they made their rejection of the vulgar creed an excuse for their rejecting and spurning every thing but their own ingenious speculations and doubtful conclusions. Nay, there have been, and still are, many who have never come in contact with such things as these,—who have never been acquainted with the forms and manifestations of any religion but that of the Gospel itself, and who have, nevertheless, either deemed it unworthy of attention, or made it the subject of their unhallowed ridicule. They have not only disclaimed all need of a revelation, but maintained the utter incredibility of every thing which pretends to that character, and the utter impossibility of evidence sufficient being furnished in support of its pretensions. These lovers of wisdom and truth, as they proudly style themselves, will not believe the testimony of the God who cannot lie, when He speaks of that Eternal Word who "was made flesh, and dwelt among us," and who is "the

power of God and the wisdom of God for salvation, to every one that believeth." "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools." Gratuitously asserting that every thing which man needs to know, and every thing which can be known with certainty, can be learned independently of any special revelation, they gravely bid the world be satisfied just with what their own narrow observations and inconclusive reasonings may teach them, as to the present condition and the future prospects of our race. They bid them be satisfied as to the footing on which they stand with their Creator, whose laws they have confessedly broken ; as to the way in which these laws are to be vindicated ; and as to the prospect, the character, and the consequences of a future judgment. On all these and such like subjects, though by far the most momentous that can affect either the present character or the ultimate condition of man,—they tell him not to be solicitous. They tell him that as *they* have nothing but very meagre and doubtful information to give, he should be content not to seek any other,—as if, indeed, they had been the counsellors of the Almighty, and all His own prophets and ambassadors, a succession of mere enthusiasts or practised impostors.

But *let* them take the light of reason and broad experience. The Scriptures take it too. Let them ask at man's natural perception of what is right and wrong, and his natural knowledge of good and evil—all slow, obscure, and contracted as that perception and knowledge now are—and let them then say, whether even these are not sufficient to convict the whole human race of sin, and to bring in the whole world guilty before God. Let them ask at these faculties, or whatever they please to call them, and say, whether these or the actions of mankind accord best with his sentiments and will—

especially when these actions are often followed by the most unequivocal expressions of his displeasure, in the shape of remorse, disease, and apprehension. If these inquiries satisfy them that "all have sinned," and that, according to the mere ordination of Providence—or Nature, if they prefer the term—"the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men"—then let them say how the sinner is to sustain, or how he is to escape it.

It will most readily be granted to them that, though God cannot countenance sin, yet He has now tolerated sinners on the earth for some thousands of years. During all that period, He has afforded, even to the guiltiest of them, many enjoyments. This is undoubtedly demonstrative of his forbearance and, to a certain extent, of his mercy. But, are they entitled to infer from it, that his treatment of them in a future state, will be precisely similar to what it has been in the present? For aught that they know or can discover to the contrary—nay, according to every view of legitimate inference—this mode of treatment and measure of retribution may not be of longer continuance than that state of things in which it is here exemplified. And besides, though it should continue, it excludes the prospect of the *relaxation* of discipline, just as completely as it does an aggravation or increase. Is this, then, all the encouragement that they can hold out for leading men to repentance, and the highest idea that they can give them of immortal happiness? Apart from that very revelation which they deny, by far the strongest evidence for the certainty of a future state is the necessity, under the government of a righteous God, of a more perfect administration of retributive justice than obtains or is exhibited in the present economy. The utmost mercy, therefore, which, on

their principles, they can teach men to expect, must consist either in annihilation, or in the maintenance of that imperfect, nay, often miserable share of enjoyment which has belonged to the guilty while on the earth. Why do they not submit to enter the school of Christ, and there be taught of God? May not the Saviour say to this class of unbelievers, as he did to the Jews, "Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life?"

But, to meet them once more on their own ground, are not the production, the existence, and the antiquity of the Scriptures, matters of fact in the history of our species, which are not more incapable of being denied than they are worthy of being investigated, and, if possible, explained, by philosophers? Have their antiquity and their genuineness been disproved? And in the remotest age in which they can be proved to have existed, was there anything in the talents and pursuits of the people whose language and literature they adorned, or anything in the state of human knowledge in the rest of the world, that will account for the production of such compositions?—compositions, containing the justest and sublimest views on the sublimest and profoundest of subjects. "Whence hath this man this wisdom?" was a question which the multitude put to one another respecting Jesus; and a similar question may be put to infidels respecting those Scriptures which testify of him. Let them answer this; and if they say, "From heaven," surely we may reply, Then why do ye not believe on him? or, if they say, "We cannot tell;" then may we remind them that they have much need of instruction and of light, and refer them to the blind man who reproved the unbelief of the Jews, in these cutting and memorable words, "Why, herein is a marvellous thing,

that ye know not from whence he is, and yet he hath opened mine eyes!"

Nor is it merely by the purity of their doctrines, the profoundness of their discoveries, and the sublimity of their views, compared with the moral and intellectual state of the age and country in which they successively appeared, that the Scriptures vindicate their claims to distinction and veneration. Some of their contents are of such a nature, and of so early a date, that they demonstrate, when connected with subsequent events, not only their own truth, but the truth and inspiration of the general records in which they are embodied. We allude to those prophecies which were given to the world, some hundreds of years previously to the events of which they spoke, and by which they were fulfilled; given, some of them, with such a minuteness, that no two events could be regarded as, in all respects, the fulfilment of the same prediction; and yet with such a degree of obscurity, that no human means could have been adopted, and no human management employed, to bring about a correspondence between the prediction and the result. It is well known, indeed, that some of the most minute and striking of these prophecies were fulfilled by the instrumentality of persons totally ignorant of their existence, or deeply interested, by their antipathies and attachments, their passions and their prejudices, to defeat them. The Jews were not more eagerly set on the death of Jesus than they were anxious to frustrate what he had said, when he foretold his resurrection. There is as little doubt that the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem, which he also foretold, was occasioned by the reckless act of a single soldier, in violation of the orders of Titus the conqueror, who anxiously wished to spare

that celebrated and splendid edifice, as there is that both the city and temple were levelled to the ground.

Now, when these well-known circumstances are duly considered, we have, in the case of this class of unbelievers as well as the others, the fullest evidence that they not only undervalue, but hate the Light, and that one of their strongest objections to it is—that it sets so little value on their own ostentatious conceits and vain imaginations. It casts all their proud speculations completely into the shade, or thoroughly exposes their fallacy and emptiness. What would be thought of the fairness and the love of science in any set of philosophers who, finding that a comet, after a period of some hundred years, had returned precisely at the time mentioned by the astronomer who had first described its orbit and calculated its velocity, should not only refuse to adopt that view of the planetary system which could explain all such motions and appearances, but continue to doubt, or obstinately to deny that the astronomer in question was acquainted with either! And what, in like manner, shall be thought of those who, notwithstanding all the light which the author of the Gospel has shed on the ways of God, and on the pathway of human existence, here and hereafter, still continue their refusal to believe on him, and to “count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ our Lord.”

3. In the third and last place, our Lord's statement that men have loved the darkness instead of the Light, may be illustrated in the case of all merely nominal Christians.—There is much secret aversion to the light on the part of many who do not openly reject Him, but who, on the contrary, proclaim themselves his disciples. This is a circumstance which we are apt to overlook. Where this aversion does not betray itself by the open

hostility or insolent contempt which mark the conduct of the Jew and the Infidel, we allow ourselves to fancy that there is nothing which deserves the name. But the light of the Gospel may be opposed by antipathies either avowed or secret. It may be met and resisted by many prejudices or by few. It is not their number, their strength, or their inveteracy, but their *nature*, which is here chiefly to be considered. It is in the principle of enmity or aversion to the truth that they all agree ; and it is this which determines the character of the individuals in whom these feelings are found. Although we adopt many of the views which the Gospel has given of religious subjects, and although we cordially subscribe to many of its statements and intimations, as expressive of our clearest and fullest convictions, we may still be guilty of rejecting the entire and indivisible Gospel. It is a message, and a gracious message from God ; and it speaks of man as altogether sinful, and of salvation as altogether the offer and the work of free grace,—of undeserved and unpurchased love. It identifies itself both with the character and the glory of its Author, and protests against being spoken of, or treated with, except as the embassy of the Eternal and Almighty King. An aversion, on any grounds, to any one of its doctrines or delineations, will discredit and belie the strongest professions that can be made of attachment to all the rest. Its various truths and provisions may be opened in slow and gradual succession to the mind of an inquirer,—just as they were slowly and successively developed and communicated to the world. In the history of his religious, as well as of his ordinary belief, there generally is a time when the truths which it has embraced are few. But, from the moment that he has embraced a single truth of the

Gospel as such, he has distinctly set to his seal to its supreme and paramount authority, and has said that, firmly as he believes this one, he is ready to believe every position or statement which he may find that it contains. He knows that God must vouch for the whole of his message, and that, if the heart rises in enmity against any part of it, it must be enmity against Him who is the Author of the whole, and who has made it what it is.

On the principle which runs through these remarks, there will be found, in the case of many who bear, and boast of the Christian name, too many illustrations of the statement that they have loved the darkness, and hated the light. This tendency has been evinced in all ages of the Gospel, and under every state in which divine revelation has existed in the world. The Israelites, though a chosen and peculiar people, were stiff-necked and rebellious; and though favoured with many most signal manifestations of Divine power, they were, previously to their long captivity in Babylon, strangely addicted to idolatry. Their character, in these respects, was much the same in the times of the Prophets as in the time of Moses. Isaiah complains, "Who hath believed our report?" and Jehovah said to Ezekiel, concerning them, "They hear thy words, but they do them not." On the introduction of the Gospel dispensation, those of them who were induced to embrace it showed a melancholy disposition to blend with it the various observances which belonged to the dispensation by which it had been preceded. They received it, not in its simplicity,—not in the love of it. The prejudices of the Jewish converts on this subject were some of the most formidable obstacles to the progress of the truth with which the Apostles had to contend. Prejudices exactly

similar were exhibited on the part of those converts who, previously to their conversion, had imbibed the doctrines of the various systems of philosophy, or had been the votaries of the prevailing superstitions. To counteract the influence of these errors appears, indeed, to have been a leading object in several passages of the New Testament scriptures. The Apostle is careful to remind the one class of converts that if, by seeking circumcision, or setting forth its necessity, they again entangled themselves with the yoke of bondage, Christ should profit them nothing. He is urgent with the other to remember that, as the temple of the Living God, they can have no agreement with the temple of idols; and that neither by their participation nor by their presence ought they to countenance the works of darkness, and the mysteries of iniquity. The Gospel of the grace of God has been exhibited under different dispensations; but the Gospel itself is *one*, and every human modification of it must be, in other words, a *corruption*. This must be the case, whether it be blended with the abrogated rites of Judaism, or with the dogmas and abominations of Paganism. Now, if it is the unseemly compound that is embraced, and to which the partiality of the disciple is evinced, it is obvious that the truth itself, in its original simplicity and purity—in its entire and unmingled state—is the object, not of his attachment, but of his aversion.

Subsequently to those earlier times of the Gospel, its history bears the same testimony as before, with respect to the treatment which it has experienced from many of those who have ranked among its disciples. Many are the shameless and dishonest liberties which have been taken with it. Plain but awful as is the anathema which is recorded and bound up in the close of the

book of Revelation, against the person who shall add to, or take away from, the words of it,—yet many have been the additional adulterations and curtailments which have been attempted, even by those who were bound “earnestly to contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.” With a sad proportion of its professed adherents, a process the very reverse of what was intended has been carried on. Instead of submitting, and seeking to submit themselves to the transforming and renovating influences of the truth, they have been busily striving to accommodate it to their own sentiments and sympathies. It was a reproach which the ignorant heathen cast on the first disciples, and perhaps the brightest ornaments, of the Christian faith, whose singleness of heart and simplicity of worship so beautifully harmonized with the spirituality of their doctrines, that they had neither altars nor sacrifices. But often, since that period, has there been just cause for reproaching numbers who subscribed themselves Christians, on account of the unscriptural and injurious multiplication of forms and ceremonies which they have introduced or sanctioned. The observance of these has been found to be much more easy and convenient, as well as more congenial, than that of “the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith.” It is an easy matter to contract a fondness for the forms and appendages of religion; because they are frequently, alas! little else than an indirect and prepossessing way of commending ourselves, under the semblance of glorifying God. The truth is, that many individuals seem either to have egregiously misunderstood the Gospel, or never to have thought of seriously seeking to know it, or, at most, to have embraced it with certain exceptions, restrictions, and reservations. It is a system or

something of their own which they have adopted, and to which they are attached ; but their attachment to this, call it what they please, is, in fact, an evidence of their objections and enmity to that which alone is entitled to be called the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

As a revelation from God, the Gospel is a system of truth,—a disclosure or delineation of things which are sometimes profound, indeed, and even mysterious, but which are, nevertheless, matters of *fact*. The great leading and distinguishing facts which constitute the framework of the system are such as can neither be disguised nor mistaken, if they are examined with anything like attention. In the statement of facts, it is not to be supposed that strong figures, peculiar idioms, obsolete phrases, or obscure allusions will in ordinary occur. All the grand doctrines of the Gospel are introduced on so many occasions, in such a variety of ways, and with such diversity of expression, that, though the original languages are now *dead* languages, there can be no want of certainty in determining what those leading facts and doctrines are. The Spirit of wisdom and of truth has not clothed those truths which He has deemed indispensable to be known, in language so ambiguous or obscure as to defeat his own purpose in revealing them. Over the languages in which they were first dictated and recorded, He has watched, and will watch, as well as over the truths themselves ; and He has employed, and will employ, the very circumstance of having put his name and his will there, as a certain means for making the knowledge of these languages be cultivated. He will thus engage the particular attention of the ministers of the Word, that they may be able to handle it intelligently and successfully for the benefit of their fellow-sinners. It is obvious that, in this manner, none

who have seriously wished, and earnestly sought to know what is essentially the Gospel, can possibly come short of that knowledge. In point of fact, however, it has happened that, of those who have had the Gospel preached to them, and who have been taught and qualified to study it, either in the original tongues or in those into which it has been faithfully rendered, multitudes have adopted views more or less discordant with those which must have occurred to the mind of every humble and honest-minded reader,—to every one who implicitly submits himself to God's teaching, and who "trembleth at His word."

Let us take a few examples. How different, in the first place, are the ideas which thousands among professing Christians have entertained respecting the nature and demerit of *sin*, and respecting the extent to which all of us are involved in it, from the ideas which the Bible unquestionably authorizes and indicates on these subjects! Because imperfection and impotence are attributes of man, and omnipotence and love attributes of God, sin is sometimes spoken of as a thing which the latter must be far readier to pardon than rigorous to punish. Notwithstanding the death of his own Son on account of it, they imagine that it demands no extraordinary amount of suffering for its atonement. Its malignity is not judged of from its being levelled against the honour and the majesty of heaven's righteous King, but rather from the detriment which it may occasion to those whom the sinner has it in his power to injure. And with respect to the extent in which we are involved in sin, what an evident desire is there to represent it as not altogether incalculable! It cannot be denied that all have sinned, and from their youth sinned daily, against some or all of the Divine commandments; but

the utter depravity and thorough corruption of the heart of man, as "alienated from the life of God," is what many are most reluctant to admit. Nay, it is what not a few are bold enough at once to deny. Yet this doctrine is most unequivocally stated in various passages of Scripture. The Scriptures do not deny the existence of many things in human nature in its present state, and many things in human character, which are, in various respects, very amiable, prepossessing, and praiseworthy; but where they find not the supreme love to God which once distinguished and adorned, but has long deserted the nature of man, they justly regard all these exhibitions as but gilded sins and painted sepulchres.

If such, then, is the repugnance which many even among professing Christians feel to the humbling doctrine of man's inherent and universal corruption, it is natural to suppose that a similar repugnance will be felt to the doctrine which ascribes *all* the honour of man's salvation to the perfect righteousness, expiatory sufferings, and prevalent intercession of the Redeemer. We find, accordingly, that many of them, while they acknowledge that there is no "other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved," discover the utmost aversion to give up the idea of having some share of credit in the work of their own salvation. They speak with a peculiar, if not a self-righteous complacency, of their remorse, their contrition, and their sorrow for sin, as if what *they* call repentance could expiate or efface the evil which they have done, or as if even *true* repentance were something of their own, which they could render unto God as a compensation for their guilt; as a security for their future behaviour; and therefore as, in part, the price of their future pardon and endless felicity.

They are ready to overlook the important circumstance, that repentance has respect chiefly to actual and personal transgression; and that, were it even to be estimated in their own way, as hiding or cancelling the multitude of their sinful acts, it would still leave without expiation, and without abatement, that *sinfulness of heart* from which—whether they attend to the doctrine or not—the Scriptures assuredly declare that all their sinful acts have proceeded. The death of Christ pacifies our consciences, not by intimating that God, instead of dealing with his sinful creatures according to the tenor of that holy law which, though so often and daringly broken, has never been repealed, is now to deal with them in a manner altogether different, and to be content with imperfect obedience. No: that law and its Author still insist on obedience the most complete; and the death of Christ intimates in reality that God will, in no case, confer the honour of his friendship on any one but in virtue of perfect, uninterrupted, and universal righteousness. He treats man, in the first instance, simply as a sinner, who has nothing to deserve but wrath and perdition. He tells him, however, that all guilty and helpless as he is, He is willing, in connection with the meritorious righteousness and death of his own Son, graciously to bestow all the promised rewards of perfect obedience on every one “who believeth on the Son,” with all his heart, and who, thus renouncing all righteousness of his own, yet seeking to be holy in all manner of conversation, will accept of salvation solely as the free gift of redeeming love. Now, this is another of the doctrines which many professing Christians so strangely modify and disfigure; and is it possible to imagine that a Saviour who preached, or the Gospel which contains it,

can be an object of their unfeigned and their unlimited affection!

With these unscriptural and self-righteous sentiments respecting the natural state of the human heart, and respecting the way of a sinner's justification and acceptance, it may easily be supposed that nominal Christians should be disinclined to admit, save in a very qualified sense, and to a very limited extent, the doctrine of *spiritual influence*—the doctrine of the inward operation of the Holy Spirit. If sin be so diminutive an evil, and if it have so slight a hold of their natural constitution as they would persuade themselves, they cannot be thought to feel much of their need of the Spirit to purify them from its pollution, and to free them from its bondage. And, if the righteousness and sufferings of Christ occupy so subordinate a place, and serve so subsidiary a purpose in the pardon and acceptance of the ungodly as they are evidently inclined to believe, they can feel just as little of their need of the Spirit to persuade and enable them to embrace Christ, and him crucified, as all their salvation and all their desire. This, however, is not merely what may be inferred from the knowledge of their sentiments on the subjects now mentioned, but it is distinctly proved and fully illustrated by a variety of circumstances. It cannot be denied that, with a large proportion of professing Christians, there is a strong partiality for all those interpretations of Scripture which avoid the necessity of admitting or introducing the direct and internal agency of the Holy Spirit, in the case of every one who is converted unto God and made meet for his kingdom. They do not deny that the mind of man is influenced toward that which is good by the Being who made him, and under whose providence he lives. Nay, they admit that, according to the arrange-

ments of Infinite Wisdom and Goodness, many events and dispensations of providence are employed to awaken reflection, to excite an interest, and to keep up an anxiety in the sinner's mind. They admit that, in such conjunctures, it may happen that the Word of God which, notwithstanding its intrinsic excellence, and its claims at all times to their serious attention, had often been set aside or set at nought, is eagerly applied to, carefully examined, and perhaps cordially embraced. They admit that, of all such results, God is undoubtedly the Author, because it is He whose word and providence are not only thus made to work together, but fitted to operate upon the understandings, the fears, and the affections of his creatures. They go further, and admit that, in the case of the Prophets and Apostles, God, by his Spirit, has exerted an influence altogether and inconceivably beyond what could have been exerted by any secondary or instrumental agency. But then, they would gladly persuade us, although there are abundant instances to prove the contrary, that it is only for the communication of prophetic knowledge and miraculous power, that these special and immediate influences of the Spirit are employed. They would, in like manner, persuade us that the truths of God's word and the terrors or the tenderness of his providence, produce their effects on the human mind, independently of any direct influences from God himself. They fancy, in short, that the mind is not originally in any state of moral impotency or blindness which needs to be rectified before the moral influence of ordinary teaching, persuasion, and discipline can be felt and obeyed.

Now, we are not going to prove that the language of Scripture, and especially of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, taken in its natural and legitimate acceptation, is directly

in the face of all this. Nothing but the aversion which we are endeavouring to illustrate, can prevent any one from perceiving that it is so. Has not the Scripture itself said that Paul may plant, Apollos may water, "but God giveth the increase?" that He who is here called the Light opened the understandings of his disciples that they might understand the Scriptures? that no man can come to Him, "except the Father who hath sent Him draw him?" that "the eyes of our understanding must be enlightened before we can know what is the hope of his calling—and what the exceeding greatness of his power to usward who believe?" and that where the Gospel comes to us, "not in word only, but also in power, and in much assurance," it is "in the Holy Ghost?" What we are concerned with at present is, to point out the glaring incompatibility between these plain, authoritative statements and the notions which are so fondly entertained by many who call themselves Christians. And if the doctrine to which these professors are so decidedly partial is thus widely different from the doctrine of Christ and his Gospel, what is this but an evidence and illustration of the charge that, taken as it is, they hate the Gospel, and actually love the darkness and not the Light?

The preceding illustrations of the statement contained in the passage before us, so far as nominal disciples are concerned, relate chiefly or entirely to the great leading *doctrines* of the Gospel. There are others, however, which may be drawn from their sentiments and feelings with respect to its *precepts*. It is a remarkable, though by no means an unaccountable circumstance, that those very men who would have it speak a language which sets a very high estimate on personal righteousness, are yet found to look on these precepts as requiring them

to seek after an unreasonable measure of this quality. They evidently feel that the commandments of God are exceedingly broad, or comprehensive, and, at the same time, exceedingly minute, strict, and spiritual. In the keeping of them, they are told that "there is great reward;" but they secretly allow that the prospect of this has rarely such an influence over them as the pleasure—the present pleasure of sin, which implies their transgression. They inwardly wish that the Divine law had been more accommodated to the inclinations of men, or,—what necessarily follows,—less accordant with the character of God! To speak plainly, they would rather that this character itself had been less perfect and holy than it is. And what is this, in fact, but to betray, if not to avow, just the great leading principle of heathen idolatry? How many among us never seriously think of conforming to the spirit of the Saviour's injunction, "Let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me!" What relief would it give to these, if this injunction could be either expunged or explained away!

When they are exhorted to self-denial,—when they are cautioned about the deceitfulness of sin,—when they are charged to beware of conformity to the world,—when they are admonished to beware of every thing which might interfere with the homage, the obedience, or the love which they owe Him,—when they are pressed and pleaded with, respecting their being constant and fervent in prayer, respecting their desire of his fellowship, and respecting the necessity of their being holy as He is holy—holy in all manner of conversation,—who of them can venture honestly to declare, that none of these things are in anywise unpalatable or unwelcome? They have boasted that they were righteous, but where is there room for boasting? They have boasted, but when their

character is laid open, and they are pressed on the subject of their duties, they plead the unfavourable circumstances under which they have been placed, the temptations to which they have been subjected, and the manifold imperfections of our common nature. Thus are they willing to make the most of a doctrine, when they have the prospect of sheltering their own guilt, though they are most reluctant to admit it to such an extent as to let the Saviour's righteousness be exalted, as the exclusive ground of a sinner's acceptance with God. The Gospel, on the other hand, holds and proclaims the utter worthlessness and emptiness of human righteousness, as a ground of such acceptance, but still its absolute indispensableness, as the badge of all who have been "accepted in the Beloved," and who would be found meet for the enjoyment of his kingdom. And if many among professors feel it irksome to follow the rules which the Gospel prescribes, and punctually to discharge the various duties which it enjoins, what is this, in reality, but a feeling of irksomeness and dislike in regard to the Gospel itself?

This aversion to the Gospel, however, is discernible, not only in their sentiments with respect to its peculiar doctrines and its spiritual precepts, but in that *general want of interest* which they betray with respect to its contents. Different classes have different portions of leisure which they can and should employ in cultivating religious knowledge, and searching those Scriptures from which it is chiefly to be drawn. Those whose unavoidable avocations or toils allow them the smallest intervals, are often, when these intervals arrive, sadly unfitted, by exhaustion and languor, for much intellectual effort or spiritual exercise. To this, however, there are numerous exceptions. There are many whose em-

ployments leave them an ample share both of leisure and of strength. Nay, there are many who have the whole of their time to dispose of according to their own pleasure; and there are comparatively few who may not have this, in a great degree at least, for one whole day in seven. And yet, of all these denominations are there not many who, from pure indifference or absolute disinclination to such matters, bestow little of their leisure, even on the Lord's day, on the private study or perusal of Divine truth? Notwithstanding the weekly exhibitions of the truth with which they are favoured, fitted as these may be to commend it to their attention, and notwithstanding the familiar and affectionate instructions and encouragements which may be not unfrequently addressed to them in private,—there are hundreds, it is to be feared, who feel little personal interest in applying “to the law and to the testimony,” which are described as “enlightening the eyes,—making wise the simple,—converting the soul,—and rejoicing the heart.” Let them think what would be brought to light, if a register could be exhibited of the manner in which their leisure—not excepting that of the Sabbath—has been occupied. Let them think of the information which such a document would furnish as to the attention which they have paid to the holy Oracles of the Living God. Let them think whether they have been growing “in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,”—whether they have been delighting in the law of God, and making it their daily and profitable meditation,—whether they have diligently taught its truths to their children,—whether they have talked of them in the house and by the way, when they were lying down, and when they were rising up,—and whether they have, as it were,

“bound them for a sign upon their hands, and worn them as frontlets between their eyes.”

It is impossible that those who are so little disposed to profit by the Light should feel either much affection or much gratitude for it. Nor is this all. The less they value it themselves, the less will they countenance or care for its being communicated to others. If, like the Jewish lawyers, they “have taken away the key of knowledge,” and shut up the kingdom of heaven against themselves, they will feel little concern in its being opened to others. They will “neither go in themselves, nor suffer those that are entering to go in.” It is thus that, in a twofold respect, they “hold the truth in unrighteousness.” They possess the record in which it is embodied, but they continue in that lukewarmness and ungodliness which it so expressly condemns. They resist its influence on their own hearts—neither accepting its offers, nor trembling at its rebuke; and they lay fetters on it, so that it is not conveyed to others who are waiting to receive it. They unrighteously exclude many from the knowledge of it, inasmuch as they teach all around them, so far as their example goes, to undervalue it,—inasmuch as they do not furnish every facility to their children and domestics, and do not frequently stir them up to lay hold on the eternal life which it preaches,—and inasmuch as, neither by their counsels, their contributions, their influence, their arguments, their appeals, nor their prayers, do they sufficiently seek to promote the cause of the Gospel. Of all this negligence they are guilty, although they must know that there are thousands around them still sitting in darkness—“in the region and shadow of death”—and perishing “for lack of knowledge.” As long therefore as there is good foundation for these remarks,—as long as spiritual lethargy and

lifelessness continue to be the distinguishing marks of many hundreds of professing Christians, we may find, within their circle, as well as among Infidels and Jews, abundant illustration of the statement of our Lord, that "men have loved the darkness and not the Light." Such being the case, we must admit the justice of their being condemned on account of that unbelief in which hatred and rejection of the Light are necessarily implied.

The illustration, however, of the justice of their condemnation will not be complete till we consider another circumstance which is principally adverted to by our Lord,—namely, that this hatred and rejection of the Light have proceeded from the sinfulness of their lives, or, to use his own words, "because their deeds were evil." But this part of the illustration must form the subject of a separate section.

SECTION III.—*That men loved the darkness because their deeds were evil.*

There is proof more than sufficient that this has been the case with respect to all the several classes whose hatred of the Light we have already attempted to illustrate. All men, as well as the Colossians, to whom the words of the Apostle were originally addressed, may justly be described as, in their unconverted state, "alienated, and enemies in their mind" to God, "by wicked works." This statement intimates not only that their wicked works proceed from, and demonstrate this enmity, but that they contribute to render it both more active and more obstinate; and that they thus serve to account for many of its most virulent and insidious movements. It is one of the melancholy and humiliating properties of the degeneracy of our nature, that we are disposed to

entertain an aversion to the person whom we have deliberately or wantonly offended ; and if he evinces a proper sense of the injury which he has received, or of the indignity which has been offered to him, we are naturally inclined rather to stand sullenly aloof than to ask his forgiveness or seek to effect a reconciliation. In very few cases, indeed, is this ever proposed, and far less effected, without the interference and mediation of friends ; and, in a large proportion of cases, even these are not only unsuccessful but complained of.

Our conduct and dispositions towards God, in similar circumstances, or so far as circumstances *can* be similar, form no exception to the remark now made. His very perfections are impiously construed by his guilty creatures into grounds of prejudice against Him ; and manifold are the prejudices which He has to meet, to disarm, and to do away, before they will be induced to believe, and therefore to accept, his overtures of mercy,—especially since He connects these overtures with the most solemn condemnation of sin, and with the most imperative injunctions respecting their future obedience. All these prejudices were in full operation, when the Son of God's love came into the world on his errand of peace ; and hence the apathy and the aversion which were then, and have ever since been manifested both to his message and to Himself.

1. It is quite unnecessary to go into detail, but in the first place, with respect to the Jews, it is evident, from the faithful character which has been given of their leading sects, that their hatred of the Light was fully followed up by their wicked works. Many of these were exposed and reproved by our Lord. He charged them with sins which they could not deny ; He pierced them with rebukes to which they could not reply, except, indeed, by

insult and outrage. On one occasion, at least, he even inflicted typical chastisement, without his authority being questioned; and he denounced the most dismal woes on them as an adulterous and unbelieving generation. He told them that, for a pretence, they made long prayers; that they not only loved greetings in the markets, and the uppermost rooms at feasts, but that, in their prayers and in their alms, they wished to be seen of men, whose honour and applause they coveted, instead of "the honour that cometh from God only." He told them that, along with this show of piety and benevolence, they were guilty of avarice, oppression and cruelty,—devouring widows' houses, and perverting the word of God to justify a son or a daughter in adhering to an unlawful vow, and in exercising the most unnatural hardness of heart toward their famishing parents. He told them that they "made clean the outside of the cup and platter, but that inwardly they were full of extortion and excess;" that they were like "whited sepulchres—beautiful, indeed, without, but within, full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness." He told them that God had designed the Temple to be a house of prayer, but that they had made it "a place of merchandise," nay, "a den of thieves." He told them that they were filling up the measure of their fathers' iniquities, and that on them should justly be visited "all the righteous blood which had been shed on the earth."

If such then, was the depraved and ungodly character of many among the Jews, in the times of our Lord, we may easily understand how their hatred of the Light proceeded, not from any thing in the Light itself deserving of hatred, but just from the reverse,—from its being directly at variance with their rooted attachments and their reprehensible practices. They hated the Light be-

cause it could not be manifested without, in some degree exposing their evil deeds. They could not approve of the principles which Jesus taught, without condemning their own; and they would not condemn what they were not inclined to renounce. In their case was exemplified the general observation made by our Lord, that "every one that doeth evil hateth the Light, neither cometh to the Light, lest his deeds should be reproved," or exposed.

2. With respect, in the second place, to the aversion which the heathen have manifested to the Light, it would be a waste of time to illustrate, at any length, the statement that it, in like manner, has proceeded from the depravity of their morals. How could the Gospel be acceptable to those who had been habituated and enslaved to a system which placed few, if any restraints, on licentiousness, while it directly countenanced, nay, deliberately inculcated the practice of idolatry? An inspired Apostle has presented us with a hideous but faithful picture of the heathenism which had prevailed, and was in his time prevailing in the world; and some of its own votaries and victims have furnished to us the elements of such a picture,—elements which, even when loosely put together, present a picture as horrid and revolting as any that ever was drawn by those who sighed and cried over all the abominations of idol-worship. Could that Gospel be hailed with joy, or embraced with affection, by an infatuated race of idolaters and sensualists? of vain-glorious philosophers or of lawless savages? It commanded the soothsayer to renounce his gain, the priest to cast away his vestments, to pull down his image, to unbind his victim, and to extinguish the fire on the altar for ever. It commanded the licentious to abandon his unhallowed pleasures, the dishonest to do justly, the re-

lentless to show mercy, the arrogant to be clothed with humility. It told the deceiver that he was every moment in the presence of an unseen God "who seeth in secret." It said to the vindictive man who had never exercised forgiveness, but had been all along ready to avenge him of his adversary, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord." Before such persons could do any thing *but* hate the Light, all benign and blessed as it was, they must have been taught to hate almost all that, through life, they had been tutored and accustomed to love. How could they but hate the Gospel while, contrary to its express injunction, they neither loved God with all their heart, nor their neighbour as themselves,—while they continued opposed to its spirit and principles,—hateful and hating one another?

Neither the nature of fallen man nor the character of the Gospel, has undergone any change, and hence it is obvious that heathenism, as it now exists, in whatever region of the earth, must still be noted for an aversion to the Light. Nor is the case materially different with respect to the coarse or the cultivated, the abandoned or the amiable members of heathen society,—blended as these, in modern times, occasionally are, with the members of a Christian community. It is quite possible, as the Gospel itself allows, that many of the former may be adorned, so to speak, with various graces of negative morality. They may not only be free from injustice, deceit, and cruelty,—from intemperance, licentiousness, and profaneness,—but they may be eminent for their integrity, truthfulness, and humanity,—for their moderation, chastity, and inoffensiveness, nay, courtesy of language. Admitting all this, however, both their hearts and their conduct may be full of evil and of guilt. The general restraints and refinements of society, in a culti-

vated age,—the celebrity as well as satisfaction which attends the exercise of generosity and the enterprises of benevolence,—the desire, perhaps, in some cases, of recommending a system of morals which dispenses with the sanctions of revelation,—and even the indirect influence of that very revelation which they reject or discard,—may all have a share in the formation and maintenance of a sober, orderly, and amiable deportment. Yet, along with all this, there may exist an utter estrangement from God, and an utter destitution of all that, in his estimation, is necessary to constitute an action morally good. If their hearts are not with Him, all their deeds are unquestionably evil, whatever present benefit may occasionally result from them to individuals or to mankind. It is absurd to think of honouring God by observing those moral duties which He has commanded us to observe toward one another, if we set no value on those which He has enjoined as relating immediately to Himself. None of us, any more than Balak, can put a seal on the lips of the Prophets and Apostles. They cannot be bribed to curse, when God instructs them to bless, nor to approve when He commands them to condemn. They will not allow the neglect of one duty to be justified, or even excused, by the observance of another. On the contrary, they solemnly say to us, in the words of our Lord himself, “These things ought ye to have done, and not to leave the others undone.”

The Scriptures insist on the religious and constant observance of all the duties which are comprehended in the first four of the Ten Commandments, not less than on the observance of the others ; and they are not more loud in their condemnation of idolatry than of impiety in its every shape. They denounce indignation and wrath against all who withhold the worship and glory which

are due to the only Living and True God, as well as against all who offer incense to idols, or pay their homage to those who are no gods. "It is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve; and it is also written, in language still more memorable, "O Lord, pour out thy fury upon the heathen that know thee not, and upon the families that call not on thy name." Now, who of all the low or learned infidels, that look with just pity or contempt upon the superstitious worship of the benighted heathen, are accustomed regularly, if at any time, to present their praises or their supplications to that God who created the heavens and the earth, and in whom they themselves "live and move and have their being?" If, then, their conduct is thus undeniably so opposite to that which the Gospel expressly requires, or to that which it so emphatically condemns, it is not to be supposed that they will evince, toward it, any measure either of favour or of fairness. Although they both believe in the existence of God, and have many accurate ideas with respect to his attributes, they continue no more to think of worshipping Him than of worshipping the sun in its strength, the moon walking in brightness, or the stars in their courses. This being the case, how can the Gospel fail to denounce their conduct, to follow them with its censure, and visit them with its displeasure? Its solemn injunction continues to be, "In everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." While this continues to be the state of matters, it is no more to be expected that the Gospel will be the object of their unfeigned and unreserved affection than that its Author should have met with the affection of those evil spirits who, while they owned him to be the Son of God, were alarmed at his approach, and

addressed to him the question, or exclamation, "Art thou come to torment us before the time!"

3. It is on the very same principle on which we have here been proceeding, that we must now, in the third place, account for the aversion with which we have already seen that many professing Christians are chargeable. It must be remembered that the leading doctrines which, in their full, unqualified, and genuine import, are not more humbling to the pride of the self-righteous than they are, in themselves, strictly according to godliness,—are the very doctrines to which they evidently feel the utmost aversion and repugnance. This circumstance furnishes strong presumptive evidence that their deeds are evil. But when we add to this the consideration that they entertain a similar aversion to many of the precepts with which these doctrines are combined, and that, instead of seeking to be more and more fully acquainted with the will of God, and more and more impressed with the blessedness of obeying it, they either undervalue or studiously avoid that knowledge of it which the Gospel unfolds,—then does the evidence against them become altogether overwhelming. The Gospel exhibits a much higher scale of duty than many of its nominal adherents ever think either of attaining or even of attempting. If they can succeed in persuading themselves that, notwithstanding the distinctness and solemnity with which every duty is there laid down and inculcated, more is not really required of them than the generality around them find it agreeable or possible to render,—then they may fancy that they are on terms of tolerable accordance with the Gospel! But it is not in this way that the Gospel will recognise their friendship, or accept their intimacy. Like its Divine Author, it tells them that if any man love any

created object, or even his own life more than the Truth itself, or than the pure and peaceable fruits of righteousness which it recommends and fosters, he is not, and in this case cannot be, one of its disciples.

If, then, they find it impossible to avoid the conviction that the Gospel, not only insists on a much higher species of religious principle than they have ever possessed or been ambitious of possessing, but will not cease to denounce their conduct as sinful and displeasing to God, in every instance in which they neglect what is enjoined or withhold what is claimed as his due,—then do they distinctly confess that they will none of its reproof. Then do they virtually allow that their dislike to it really proceeds from the evil of those doings by which its reprehensions are incurred. On whatever other grounds mere nominal Christians may profess to be attached to the Gospel, it surely cannot be on the ground that it denounces against every sin its first and awful recompence of reward, namely—death. No man would be believed who should pretend, even while the words of some profane oath were ever and anon escaping from his lips, that he loved the Gospel which says, “Swear not at all.” The prayerless professor surely cannot love it, because it has enjoined it as an imperative duty, “Pray without ceasing.” Neither can the heartless formalist; because its Author has said, “I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.” The case is still more striking in regard to those who would combine the forms of devotion with the crimes of oppression and bloodshed. To such He says, “When ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you; yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood.” The man who, in every thing that can minister to his present advan-

tage, gratification, or amusement, is determined to "go on frowardly in the way of his heart," cannot, surely, love those Scriptures, which will not be silent, but speak out, in a voice both of threatening and displeasure, "But know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment."

Such persons will hate the Gospel, because not to love it altogether is to hate it; and they will hate it on account of those very attributes which endear it to the hearts of all who have become partakers of the holiness which it inculcates. They will hate it, because it not only stands in opposition to their own true character, but because it throws a broad and searching light on their evil deeds and their crooked ways. They hate it, because it will not be silent on the subject of their sins and the nature of their shortcomings. Why is it that many who arrogate to themselves the Christian name, are impatient of the society of the truly godly? Why do they so readily brand them with the opprobrious titles of pharisees and fanatics, as if it were not "good to be always zealously affected in a good thing?" Why do they thus scoffingly and "falsely accuse their good conversation in Christ?" Why do they inwardly, if not openly, resent the mild but serious admonitions of those whom their levities have offended, or their woful unconcern has distressed? Does not all this speak but too plainly as to their true character, and as to the real secret of their enmity to the Gospel, and to those who walk, in some measure, according to its dictates? What is it that renders vague speculations and general reflections, on the part of a public teacher, much more palatable to many than are those pointed and authoritative statements, those close and searching deductions, those bold, direct, and striking appeals which show that

he wishes to have to do chiefly with "the inner man." Is it not evident that men would not wish to get quit of their convictions, unless they were unwilling to depart from their iniquities? If the light occasions a painful sensation in the eyes, it is a proof, not of its want of adaptation to that organ in a sound state, but of weakness and disease in those to whom it thus causes uneasiness and pain.

If an institution were to be opened for merely *pointing out* to individuals their personal deformities or their bodily diseases, we should not be surprised though not a single one ever applied to have these things detected and described to him. But should the authors and conductors of this institution undertake, with as good authority as the Gospel claims, or is admitted to possess, to *remove* all these deformities, and to heal all these diseases,—we should then be surprised indeed, if it were not, like the pool of Bethesda, surrounded and frequented every day by eager and expectant multitudes. We should marvel if thousands did not learn to regard even the most trifling blemishes as trifling no longer,—since, in the midst of all but universal strength and beauty, even those would be estimated as sufficiently serious, both in their aspect and in their consequences. Nay, we should consider the persons who despised or neglected the removal of their infirmities and their uncomeliness as having a sort of infatuation, or of miserable pride, in being in these things, if in nothing better, distinguished from the rest of mankind! Now, what is it but a blindness to their sins, or an unwillingness to forsake them,—an obstinate unbelief or unconcern as to their consequences,—that makes so many among those to whom Christ is preached as the reprover of sin and the Redeemer of sinners, utterly

and practically, though not avowedly, despise his reproof, and along with it his salvation? Might it not be said of them, as of many among his ancient people, "Their heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them?"

It is in the way, then, which we have here attempted to explain, that our Lord accounts for the unbelief which Himself and his Gospel have experienced. He looks on the aversion which men entertain and the unbelief which they evince respecting the Light, as originating in the sinfulness of their hearts and the depravity of their habits. He holds it as a general principle of which they afford the most striking illustration, that "every one that doeth evil hateth the Light, neither cometh to the Light, lest his deeds should be reproved." There is not, indeed, a wider opposition between light and darkness themselves than between those who seek, and those who shun the Truth. It is here that some very strong and remarkable analogies may be found between things in the natural, and things in the moral world. Some plants of the deadliest poison are produced in the shade, and not in the sunshine. Almost all the larger beasts of prey seek their prey by night, and not in the day-time. They thus betray a sort of consciousness, if one may say so, of their predatory character; and with a sort of skulking timidity, as well as from a natural jealousy and hatred of each other, they generally prowl singly, or alone. Among mankind, thieves, robbers, and murderers, evince, in general, a similar aversion to the light; and sinners of every description betray as great

an antipathy to the Light which discloses them to themselves, as those outrageous offenders manifest to the light which discovers and detects them to their neighbours. Like these offenders, too, sinners of every description often screen and encourage one another in sin; and they sometimes betray themselves by an assumed and unnatural boldness. At other times, they betray themselves by an unexpected and guilty fear. "The wicked flee when none pursueth;" and the guilty not unfrequently deny and disclaim the crime, before they are accused or even suspected of its commission.

To the accuracy of these observations, and the justice of the statements which they are intended to illustrate, it is no exception to admit that there are some who have arrived at such a pitch of audacity and madness as to make a mock of sin, instead of attempting to conceal it. Some have the miserable vanity of wishing to be thought more hardened, daring, and accomplished in iniquity than they really are, and thus actually glory in their shame. But this is only an apparent exception. There is no man, perhaps, who has not some one companion, or set of companions, on whose good opinion he places no inconsiderable value,—the forfeiture of which would fill him with shame and be felt to cover him with disgrace. Both he and they may have departed most widely and wofully from the pure and peaceable morality of the Gospel, for which a most odious system may have been substituted. But, according to their perverted scale of merit and demerit, of honour and dishonour, he will, so long as he is imbued with the spirit of the fraternity, anxiously, and on all occasions, shun whatever may expose him to the blight of their indignation, the severity of their reproof, or the bitterness of their ridicule.

There appears, therefore, to be really no exception to the general assertion, that every one who doeth evil,—or that, at least, which himself and those around him regard as evil,—hates and avoids the Light. But Oh! what a dreadful portion and what a foul infusion of evil must there be in those whom it induces to hate and turn away from the light of the blessed Gospel,—that Gospel which, while it lays open the wickedness of the sinner's heart, would also guide his steps into the way of peace! How justly does the Apostle connect “unbelief” with “an evil heart,” and what an idea should we form of the guilt of unbelief, when we find that this is its true and frightful origin! If unbelief, the love of darkness, and the practice of sin, are thus inseparably linked together, Oh! how earnest should we be that our souls should escape from, and have no future connection with such a dreadful combination! What is this but a league with hell,—a fellowship with the powers of darkness? If from such a league we have been already separated let us nevertheless remember that *weakness* of faith is perpetuated, and generally occasioned, just by the same evil practices which explain the utter *want* of it; that the tendency of sin is to infuse distrust and enmity into the soul, and to provoke the righteous displeasure of “Him who hath called us out of darkness into his marvellous light,” and “translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.” Let us remember that, as there is still much that we have to learn from Him and to receive from Him, before we can be meet for “the inheritance of the saints in light,” there is nothing which will more effectually impede our attainments, and nothing more certainly incur his condemnation than the workings of “an evil heart of unbelief.”

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CHARACTER AND LEADING MOTIVE OF THE BELIEVER IN COMING TO THE LIGHT.

JOHN III. 21.

THE preceding observations tend to illustrate, it is hoped, the justice of the condemnation of them that believe not, and to fix our attention on unbelief as the ground of our heaviest condemnation. They appear to be sufficient to satisfy every impartial observer that all who hate, reject, and shun the light do this, not because the light itself is not peculiarly necessary, beneficent, and pure, but because their deeds are evil; and because it is by the light that they would be detected and reproofed. They not only are evil-doers, but they wish to continue in their sins; and therefore they habitually shun that which would subject them to unpleasant exposure or reproof from others, as well as to compunctious visitings of their own consciences.

That this is the true account of their aversion to the light—of their not believing in the name of the only-begotten Son of God—seems to be proved by the different reception which is uniformly given to Him and to his Gospel by every one whose actual character is the opposite of theirs,—by every one who is honestly and earnestly desirous “to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.” It was partly with a view, perhaps, to the further illustration

of the inseparable connection between unbelief and ungodliness, and, consequently, of the justice of the unbeliever's condemnation, that our Lord introduced his concluding remark to Nicodemus, respecting those who do the truth, or whose works are wrought in God. If they whose deeds are evil come not to the Light, lest these deeds should be reproved,—and if, on the other hand, they whose deeds are agreeable to the word of God do come to the Light, in order that they may both do it homage and enjoy its benefits,—then there is here a double proof that every instance of unbelief arises from, or is inseparably connected with, immorality of conduct, and depravity of heart.

There is reason to believe, however, that our Lord had another object in view besides this, when he introduced the concluding remark. It is probable that, besides directing attention to the guilt and condemnation of unbelief, he intended to exhibit a striking outline of the character of those who honour, and are honoured by, the Light, in coming to it. He probably meant to show, both how they are best prepared to receive it, and how they may most suitably express their sense of its original and increasing value. Looking at the remark in this latter point of view, it is well entitled to a separate and attentive investigation. “He that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God.”

In attempting to unfold more fully the import of this observation, we shall consider, in the first place, what is implied in doing the truth; in the second place, the necessary connection between doing the truth and coming to the light; and in the last place, the great leading motive by which every one who comes to the Light is actuated in coming.

I.—*What is implied in doing the truth.*

“The truth” is a phrase which in Scripture is employed to denote, not only that which is the opposite of falsehood, but that *body* of divine truth which is denominated the Gospel, or that which is contained in the whole existing records of inspiration. That seems to be called the truth, which, at the time when the phrase is used, constitutes the entire revelation of the Divine Will. In speaking of “the knowledge of the truth,”—“the belief of the truth”—and the “obeying of the truth,”—the Apostle appears to refer more immediately to what one of them calls “the word of truth, the Gospel of our salvation.” But in speaking of “rightly dividing the word of truth,” he seems to allude rather to the *whole* word of God, as another evidently does, when speaking of “the Father of Lights,” he says, “Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth.” The Psalmist seems to use the phrase in the same way, when addressing God in prayer: “Take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth; for I have hoped in thy judgments.” In the verse before us, it is probable that our Lord spoke chiefly in allusion to the body of truth which is comprehended and unfolded in the Old Testament Scriptures. There is no doubt, that his remark is equally just with respect to such disclosures and revelations as were made to the Patriarchs and their families, previously to the existence of the written word at all,—nay, with respect to those intimations of the Divine will which have been made to all mankind, in that moral constitution which God has given them, and that moral discipline which He exercises over them. These intimations, indeed, are, com-

paratively speaking, both limited and obscure, yet, so far as they go, and where nothing further has been promulgated, they may be regarded as thus far the truth. It is no less certain that our Lord's remark holds perfectly just with respect to the fullest and clearest of all manifestations of the Divine Will that ever was, or ever shall be, vouchsafed to man,—that embodying of the whole counsel of God, which is exhibited to us in the Gospel; in other words, those Scriptures of the New Testament which did not yet exist, at the time when he held this discourse with the Jewish ruler.

By "the truth," then, we may here understand the authentic manifestation of the Divine Will, without restricting ourselves to that particular manifestation which was enjoyed by the countrymen of the individual to whom our Lord here spoke. And, thus understanding the term, it will be easy to explain what is meant by *doing* the truth. It means more than the speaking of nothing but what is true, or than the observance of sincerity,—veracity in all that we say, and the exhibition of integrity in all that we do. It is opposed not merely to falsehood, fraud, duplicity, and unfaithfulness, but to all that is implied in walking in darkness and not keeping the commandments of God. It is exactly synonymous with the observance or obedience of the truth, and implies that a man's life and practice are animated by the doctrines, and regulated by the precepts in which the truth, as it were, consists. It implies that, as all the doctrines of true religion are doctrines according to godliness, so the general temper and tenor of his conduct are in manifest accordance with these doctrines, to which he professes his adherence.

But who are those of whom it can be said that they do the truth, in the sense now explained? The revelation contained in the Old Testament is much less complete than that which is contained in the New. The revelations vouchsafed to the Patriarchs, and transmitted by tradition to their descendants, must have been still less complete than the former; and the disclosures made to mankind by the law which is written on their hearts, and by the moral discipline which a wise and righteous Providence exercises over them, are much more incomplete than even these. But "the truth," even in the most imperfect measure in which it can be exhibited, contains a great deal more than any man, in his natural state, is either competent or inclined to observe. This is what the fullest revelation of the truth itself distinctly and repeatedly asserts; and what the experience of every individual and the history of the whole species, most wofully, but most abundantly, attest. "They that are in the flesh,"—in their natural or unregenerate state,—
 "cannot please God." It is impossible, then, that any man, in that state, can really be represented as a doer of the truth. Under whichever of the Divine dispensations a man happens to live, or whatever degree of illumination has been granted to him, with respect to the will of God and the duty of his rational creatures, he may be made a subject of Divine grace; and if, like the Jews at the time of our Lord's appearance, he enjoys only one of the earlier, and therefore less complete exhibitions of the truth, that grace will, nevertheless, not only enable him to maintain a conduct conformable, in general, to what the truth specifies or implies, and to what a love and belief of it must incline him to observe,—but it will effectually persuade and prepare him to

hail with joy, and embrace with gratitude, any further revelation which God may be pleased to make.

It is grace alone, however, which can do this ; for although, independently of this principle, men, under the influence of conscience, or fear, or shame, or interest, or vanity, or ambition, may frequently do some things which are enjoined by the law and agreeable to the will of God,—yet there are none who do not, far more frequently, do violence to conscience and act in open defiance of its dictates. The greater number, when their passions, their present interests, and the practices of those around them, urge or invite them to a different course from that which the law would prescribe, speedily evince how little their hearts are disposed to yield obedience to the latter, and how completely predominant is the influence of the former. From these considerations, therefore, it appears that our Lord, in using the language before us, does not insinuate that the will of God may be cordially obeyed by any who are destitute of his grace, but merely, that one who, in consequence of this principle, is qualified and accustomed to render such obedience, is prepared to express his obligations to its Author—to embrace with readiness every new proposal, and to receive with gratitude every new communication, which comes to him with the stamp and seal of so high an origin.

II.—*The necessary connection between doing the truth and coming to the Light.*

In the preceding remarks, we have endeavoured to show that, although men may be enabled, in some measure, to do the truth, before they have actually come to Him who is emphatically denominated the Light, or before

they have acquired the knowledge of "the truth as it is in *Jesus*,"—yet none of them can possibly be understood to have obeyed from the heart, without the previous communication of Divine grace. The possession of this grace, then, being implied in the obedience here spoken of by our Lord, we should be quite prepared for the statement, that every one whose life and practice are agreeable to the truth, is ready to come to the Light,—because this is just the fullest and brightest exhibition of it that has ever been made to him; and because the sublimest doctrines and the holiest precepts are here combined with the most perfect holiness of personal character, that he is able to conceive. As a conscientious and habitual doer of the truth, he must be regarded as one who sincerely loves it; and it is just in the Light that he finds the very substance and perfection of all that the truth which he already knows can recommend.

Our Lord, in his remarks respecting men's shunning or their coming to the Light, alluded, in the first place, to the reception which he met with from his countrymen. In their case, certainly, the connection between obedience to the truth which they already possessed, and their coming to the Light, was very remarkably illustrated. After the voice of prophecy had been silent for ages, the first individual to whom it again spoke, by the lips of an angel, was one who is described as "walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, blameless." And no sooner did Zacharias see that there should be a fulfilment of the things which were spoken to him than he fondly anticipated, and devoutly embraced, things still more important and glorious beyond them. Filled with the Holy Ghost, he exclaimed, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for He hath visited

and redeemed his people, and hath, in remembrance of his holy Covenant, raised up an horn of salvation for us, in the house of his servant David."

The still more important intimation with which the Virgin Mary was honoured, respecting that Saviour to whom she herself was ordained to give birth, was received with a humility, a submissiveness, and an implicit faith, which evinced a peculiar elevation and sanctity of character; and showed how highly she was distinguished for general conformity to the truth which the holy Oracles had revealed. Previously to the rapturous effusion of the father of the Baptist, she had "rejoiced in God her Saviour," and celebrated the "remembrance of his mercy; as he spake to the fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever." In the course of that celebration, indeed, she has stated the very principle which her own conduct serves so beautifully to illustrate: "His mercy is on them that fear Him, from generation to generation."

In the case of the aged Simeon, too, the illustration of the connection which we are now considering is so striking, that it is almost expressly pointed at by the Evangelist, who describes him as "just and devout, and waiting for the consolation of Israel." So fully was he prepared to welcome and come to the Light, that the view and embrace of his Infant Saviour was all that he seemed to live for; and, being gratified in this, he solemnly and fervently blessed God, saying, "Lord, now lettest Thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word, for mine eyes have seen thy Salvation." Nay, such was the reception which he gave to the Light, that it is under this very title that he speaks of the Saviour, in the close of his doxology,—*"A Light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel."* On the same occasion, let us remember, the Infant Messiah was

hailed by Anna, the prophetess,—to whose long-tried and unabated piety the sacred historian has borne the most honourable and emphatic testimony.

To this illustrious list, we must add the name of the Baptist himself, the eminence of whose personal graces, as the Prophet of the Highest, was equalled only by the joy, the humility, and the constancy with which he bore witness to Him who came after him,—to “the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.” And lastly, let us add the name of Nathanael, one of the earliest disciples of Jesus as the Messiah, in reference to whom Jesus himself testified, as Nathanael was coming to him,—“Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!”

The examples which have now been produced, abundantly prove, that none among the Jews could clearly understand, cordially believe, and habitually obey what was contained in their ancient Scriptures, without being ready, when Christ was preached to them, to acknowledge and welcome him as the Person “of whom Moses in the Law, and the Prophets did write.” They prove, not only that “them that honour God, He will honour,” and that “his salvation is nigh them that fear him,”—but that such are most disposed to embrace it, when it is brought to them, and to cling to it as their most precious and enduring portion. These examples go farther in proof of this than do any general reasonings; and although the instances which have been adduced are found in the history of a people who were privileged to possess the lively Oracles of God, yet, in these very writings, similar instances are recorded, as having occurred in the case of persons who enjoyed the benefit of Divine communications indeed, but not in the fulness and clearness of a written and inspired record.

Previously to the dispensation of Moses, no such record existed ; yet the truth, which was conveyed with greater and greater fulness to the successive Patriarchs, wrought among them its natural and salutary effects. Who can doubt but that Noah's general conformity to the truth which he had received from his ancestors, prepared him more cordially to embrace the fuller discoveries which were directly vouchsafed to himself? In the case of Abraham, we have a remarkable instance of the connection between the observance and estimation of what has been already revealed, and the cordial acceptance of what is unfolded, for the first time, to the faith of a believer. Examples of the same kind are presented to us in the case of Isaac, of Jacob, of Joseph, and of Moses,—all of whom are celebrated by the author of the epistle to the Hebrews, for their faith and their godly fear. It was their walking by faith, in the truth already revealed, which prepared them to give an immediate and grateful reception to every future communication that was made to their faith. It is in this matter as in the history of scientific discovery. That which enlarges the circle of our knowledge, and sheds a fuller light on truths already known, not only increases our desire to know, but brings us into nearer contact with the extended region in which fresh discovery may be expected to reward our watchful and searching observation. Thus it was faith which led Moses to choose “rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.” It was his conformity, in this matter, to the will of God, which prepared him to exercise still further faith, when he was called and commissioned to rise up and lead the Israelites out of the land of bondage. “By faith,” says the Apostle, “he forsook Egypt, not fearing

the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible."

The connection between doing the truth and coming to the Light, may also have been illustrated by examples among those who enjoyed nothing better than an imperfect manifestation of the will of God. The more imperfectly that his will is revealed, the more defective, in ordinary, will be the conformity to it which men exhibit, even in things to which that revelation distinctly extends. It may be supposed that, among men in such a state, instances of doing the truth will be comparatively rare. It cannot be doubted, however, that Divine grace may be communicated to individuals under *any* outward dispensation,—and that where it is thus granted, it will incline and enable them to walk according to the light which they possess. It must, consequently, be true in their case, as well as others, that conformity to the will of God, so far as to them made known, will eminently contribute to their embracing and avouching any further communication with which He may be pleased to favour them. Having real grace, in however small a measure, will make them the readier and more grateful recipients of grace more abundant. They who are faithful in that which is least, will be faithful also in much. It is possible that, at this moment, there are many among the Gentiles who are ready to receive, and to profit by the manifestation of that Gospel of "the grace of God which bringeth salvation," and that many of the isles are waiting for his Law. It is true, in short, even with respect to the class of which we are now speaking, that,—although few positive instances of the fact fall within the reach of our knowledge,—“If any man will do the will of God, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God.”

But if the obedience of the truth, even in its more imperfect forms, and still more in the form in which it was presented in the Jewish Scriptures, was calculated to beget a readiness to come to that Light by which the way of salvation was to be more perfectly revealed,—we may safely conclude that those who have already come to it, and been rejoicing in it, will be specially ready to come to it again and again. It is, indeed, to them who believe in Jesus Christ that “He is precious.” It is his grace that has made them what they are; and it is “through Him that they have access by faith into this grace wherein they stand.” It is “out of his fulness that they all receive, and grace for grace,” according to the fulness which is treasured up in Him. By obedience to the truth, they have been seeking to glorify that God who has “called them to glory and to virtue;” and having found that “in the keeping of his Commandments there is,” even in this life, “great reward,”—that “the ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness, and that all her paths are peace,”—they apply to Him, through the Mediator, for guidance, encouragement, and aid. Thus are they prepared for obeying Him more fully, and for “perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” Their prayer as the disciples of Christ is, “Lord, increase our faith.” The language, at once of humility and of holy resolution, which each of them cordially adopts, is that of the Apostle when he says, “Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect. But this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God, in Christ Jesus.” They came to him at first that they might have life; and they come to him again—they come to him daily—that they may have it more abundantly. “The eye is not

satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing ; truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun." The green earth, and the azure firmament spangled with stars, are beautiful and bright, gaze on them as often as you please. The voice of melody which wakes the spring, loses none of its enchantment because we have listened to it a thousand times before. Health loses none of its value because we may have enjoyed it, almost without interruption, ever since the days of our childhood ; and liberty is deprived of none of its charms because we have, all our life long, never known what it is to be in bondage.

So it is with respect to the blessings and enjoyments which the Christian has tasted in following his Master and obeying the truth. It is Christ who supplies to him the bread of life, and water from the wells of salvation ; and the daily supplication which he addresses to him is this, " Lord, ever give me this bread ; give me this water." " Blessed," says wisdom, " is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors." This is the blessedness which the Christian, having once tasted, seeks continually to taste again ; and his enjoyment is unspeakably enhanced by the way in which it is furnished to him by that God who gives him all things richly to enjoy. He feels it to be essential to his spiritual nourishment and comfort ; and it is that to which, at all times, he has free and full access,—yea, that which, apply as often as he may, is altogether inexhaustible. It is that, moreover, which the Author of his salvation himself continually ministers. It is only by coming to " the Fountain of living waters," that the believer can drink abundantly, and every time that he receives a supply of the blessings which he needs, he is made to taste the additional and peculiar pleasure of

“fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.” He receives that spiritual food by which he is to be nourished unto life eternal, in a manner similar to that in which he received the nourishment which maternal affection furnished and administered to him in his infancy. “No good thing will God withhold from them that walk uprightly;” but, bountiful and gracious as He is, his bounty and grace were never designed, and never can be allowed, to make his dear children feel themselves independent of Him. It is in Him that they, as well as others, live, and move, and have their being; and in Him that all his regenerate offspring are to find the daily resources which they need for the maintenance of that new principle of life which He has put within them. Any other mode of supply would not only be less honourable to Himself, but less gracious and less beneficial to them. He would be treating them with greater distance and reserve; and, at the same time, not permitting them so distinctly to recognise the true and immediate source of all the enjoyments which they receive.

It is instructive and delightful to trace this intimate and growing connection between obedience to the truth and readiness to come to the Light. What man is so desirous for fellowship with God in Christ as he who can connect the most precious of the blessings which he has received, with the prayers which he has presented at the throne of grace? Who was it that could say, “O my God, early will I seek thee; my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is.” It was he who could add, in explanation of this desire, “To see thy power and thy glory so as I *have* seen thee in thy sanctuary;” and who had frequently rejoiced when it was said, at the times of public worship, “Go ye up into the house of

your God." Who is the man who lifts most frequently an eager and believing eye towards the Cross on which the Son of man was lifted up? It is he who has already felt its power in crucifying the world to him, and him to the world. It is he who has already obeyed the gracious invitation of the Saviour, "Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth;" and who, by so doing, has been strengthened while under temptation, sustained while under affliction, and comforted while in the midst of sorrow. Who is the man that renews his application, with the utmost regularity and earnestness, that he may receive "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ?" It is he who has the near prospect of being "absent from the body and present with the Lord,"—of soon seeing "face to face,"—of knowing even as also he is known,—and of having nothing to long for, but all things to enjoy. Prayer is the last act of the believer's life. His desires, animated by his faith, carry him again and again to the Mercy-seat, till, at length, He "who sitteth on the throne" takes him, as it were, into his arms, and satisfies every desire as quickly as it is formed. And then, more than ever, he refers all his enjoyments to the lovingkindness of that Mediator who has redeemed him with his own blood. All his desires are anticipated, yet is he sensible every instant, that there is a special outlet and outpouring of everlasting love, in every fresh delight that he tastes. The whole faculties and affections of his soul are more eagerly bent than ever on the works and the ways of his God and Redeemer. He knows, even now, more than angels themselves could have conceived, when they first beheld man become, through apostacy and sin, a just object of the Divine displeasure; but the era is destined to arrive when he

shall know, perhaps, as much as angels know at present. Even then, however, he shall be as much as ever on the stretch for heavenly knowledge; and he shall receive all accessions of it, from the same Holy and Eternal Fountain which has been already, to some extent, opened by the Scriptures of truth. The Lamb who is the Light of the world, is also the Light of the Celestial City; and "the pure river of the Water of life, clear as crystal," is described as "proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb."

III.—*The Believer's Leading Motive in coming to the Light.*

This motive is expressed in the following words,— "that his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God." The idea most naturally suggested by this rendering of the original phrase "wrought in God"—is that these works are wrought in virtue of the spiritual union which exists between God and those who have been enabled to obey the truth. It intimates more particularly that these works are the effects of that Divine energy which the Spirit of God has exerted on their souls, or of that vital, vivifying, and active principle of grace, which the Spirit has implanted and is constantly invigorating within them. Their works may justly be said, in this sense, to be wrought in God, because "it is God who worketh in them, both to will and to do;" and because it is "his working which worketh in them mightily."

The original phrase, however, might, with equal propriety, have been rendered, "wrought agreeably to God." According, indeed, to a very general usage of the words in the Common Version, the former of these renderings

may be regarded as perfectly synonymous with the latter. Thus, speaking of his father David, Solomon says to God, "According as he walked before thee *in truth, and in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart.*" Thus also the Psalmist speaks of all God's works being done *in truth*; and thus both the Psalmist and the Apostle speak of His judging the world *in righteousness*,—that is, *agreeably to truth and to righteousness.*

But if, in the case now before us, the usage referred to be not exemplified,—if the expression "*wrought in God*" be not considered as of precisely the same import as the expression "*wrought agreeably to God,*"—still, it is obvious that the one of these things, at least, *implies* the other. If a man's deeds are wrought in consequence of his spiritual union with God, or by means of that grace which has been given to him, they cannot but be agreeable to God, or in accordance with his will. Nor, on the other hand, can any man's deeds be, really and in principle, acceptable and well pleasing in God's sight, unless they are produced and animated by faith in Him and love to Him; for it is expressly intimated that "*without faith it is impossible to please Him.*" It is, therefore, of little practical moment which of the above interpretations of the phrase be adopted. It is evident that the deeds of those who obey the truth are here meant to be contrasted with the evil and reprobable deeds of those who come not to the Light, but, on the contrary, shun it, and do so, just because their deeds are of this character. Our Lord manifestly represents it as the grand and leading motive which actuates the former class in coming to the Light which the latter shun, that they wish to show forth the glory

of God, by those works "which are by Jesus Christ, unto his glory and praise."

Confining our attention to the passage immediately under review, the motive now referred to might be supposed to be, not merely their leading or principal, but their only one for coming to the Light, for it is the only one here mentioned in explanation of their coming. Yet it is not the only one by which their proceeding is influenced. If those whose deeds are evil shun the Light, lest their deeds should thereby be detected and reproved, then those who obey the truth may be understood to seek it, that they may search themselves by it, and, by its aid, come to a more thorough knowledge of their own hearts. While they desire to give God the praise, and to express their obligations to his grace for whatever in their conduct is agreeable to his holy mind and will, they desire also to have a more perfect knowledge of all their sins and shortcomings, and, in particular, of what is yet lacking in their faith. It was under the influence of such a motive that the Psalmist thus addressed himself to the Searcher of hearts: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." This is a motive, the influence of which must be felt by all who feel the obligation of the precept, "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves." It will also be felt by all who seriously consider that one great excellence of "all Scripture" is, that it "is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." All who obey the truth must, in like manner, be understood to set a high value on whatever shall exhibit to them the truth more fully or more clearly, and afford to them the most accurate

and complete directions for their still more uniformly and perfectly obeying it. It is the united influence of such considerations as these which must dictate every such prayer as that which is commended by Elihu in the book of Job: "That which I see not, teach Thou me; if I have done iniquity, I will do so no more." But enough as to these matters. Let us now return to the consideration of that which alone is specified in the words here used by our Lord.

In explaining what was meant by doing the truth, and in showing who those are who can be said to do it, we stated that they must necessarily be understood to be possessed of Divine grace, taught and born of God, created anew after his own image, and therefore fitted and inclined to observe all that is revealed of his holy will. Now man, as originally created, was not only fitted to manifest the glory of God, but it was his constant aim and peculiar delight to seek to do so. During the period of his innocence, that glory was undoubtedly the subject of his devout and habitual contemplation; and the promotion of it was as truly the object of desire in all that he did, as the conscious possession of God's image and approbation truly constituted the chief happiness of his being. Fallen man, when created anew, and thus restored, in the leading features of his moral nature, to the image of Him that created him, comes again to be actuated by holy and elevated motives, to entertain a habitual concern for the advancement of the Divine glory, and to derive his principal as well as his purest enjoyments from a heavenly source. Restored, in part at least, to the true dignity of his nature, and having higher hopes than ever of exaltation among the sons of God, he becomes yet more than ever truly humble. His whole soul is deeply occupied with

the consideration how he may best "show forth the praises of Him who hath called him out of darkness into his marvellous light." Neither in his charities, his fastings, nor his devotions, does he seek to be seen of men ; yet, in unison with the admonition of the Saviour himself, he rejoices when he can cause his "light to shine before others, that they may see his good works, and glorify his Father who is in heaven." He is delighted when he can adopt the language of David, "Come and hear, all ye that fear the Lord, and I will declare what He hath done for my soul ;" or when he can say, as Paul did regarding those who had heard that he was "preaching the faith which once he destroyed,"—"And they glorified God in me." He is like a flower which, whatever be its comely proportions, its graceful symmetry and distribution of parts, and the sweetness of its fragrance, can exhibit no richness, variety, or brilliancy of colour—nothing that can attract the admiration of an observer—unless it be gemmed with the rays of light. The most beautiful and glowing colours by which it attracts and delights the eye, belong, not so much to the flower itself as to the heavenly radiance with which it is visited. It opens its blossoms to the sun, only, as it were, that it may drink of that radiance afresh, and then reflect back to the sun himself, to the whole face of the smiling heavens, and to the eye of every passer by, the beauty and lustre which it has borrowed from that glorious luminary.

The man who, in compliance with the gracious invitation addressed in the Gospel to every sinner, has been persuaded and enabled to come to the Light, is undoubtedly a new man. Feeling indebted to Christ for the invitation, and for the disposition and the power to comply with it, he manifests this by seeking to become

a follower and servant of his gracious Benefactor. He resembles some of those whom our Lord miraculously cured of bodily infirmities and diseases, and who made the first use of their new or recovered faculties, their renovated limbs, or their disenthralled organs, in doing homage to the Author of their mercies—glorifying at once the God of Israel and Jesus of Nazareth,—“walking, and leaping, and praising God.” As the lame by their walking, the dumb by their speech and their singing, and the blind by rapturous manifestations of their delight in the first outburst of a new world of beauty, magnificence, and splendour on their new-formed and astonished vision, severally proclaimed their gratitude and joy,—so does every poor sinner who really comes to the Light wish it to be known “that his works are wrought in God.” Under whatever form of the truth he may have previously lived, he is anxious to evince that the conformity to it which he has endeavoured to exhibit, is to be referred to the operation of the Spirit on the inner man of his heart; and he would draw the attention of others to this conformity, just that glory may be ascribed, and that thanksgiving may be offered to God by many other hearts besides his own. “Rejoice with me,” is his language; “O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together.” It was thus that the two disciples to whom the Baptist pointed out Jesus as “the Lamb of God,” and who immediately followed him, lost no time in bringing to him Simon, who was the brother of one of them; and no sooner had Jesus himself found and called Philip, than this individual made haste to acquaint Nathanael that they had “found Him”—meaning the Messiah—“of whom Moses in the Law, and the Prophets did write.” And glad as they might all feel when they first approached

Him, and when He was first made personally known to them, gladly did they still continue to listen to the gracious words which He uttered, as He "instructed them in things pertaining to the kingdom of God." With what ineffable delight, and yet with what growing humility, did they trace the resemblance which their own characters came gradually to exhibit, to that which was delineated by their Master, as the character of those who were the children of God and heirs of salvation!

Well may the motive which we have been here considering exercise the influence which is ascribed to it by our Lord. How precious must He who is the Light of the World be to every one who has been taught to obey the truth which God has revealed! It is this Light alone which can bring fully into view, and into operation, the principles which regulate his heart, his language, and his life. It is this alone which can exhibit to others the strength and character of his faith; which can demonstrate that his deeds are wrought in God, or in accordance with his will, because they are the direct and genuine fruits of that change which God himself has produced on his heart. Having come to the Light, he has resolved to walk in the Light, and to follow all its leadings. Having been enabled so far already to obey the truth, there is no point at which he would halt or hesitate in his obedience. He is anxious to show that, to whatsoever extent the will of God may be made known and its requirements carried, he is ready to acknowledge and obey it. He comes to the Light, not because he courts or expects distinction, but because he would bear witness to that which has wrought in him mightily. He desires it to be widely known that his best actions are not to be imputed to any supposed wisdom, rectitude, amiableness, or benevolence in him,

when he is himself filled with gratitude, in the knowledge that they have proceeded from a far purer and loftier source. He wishes it to be understood that it is grace alone which can have imparted any sacredness or consistency to any part of his past life, and that it is grace alone which can stamp them, in any measure, on the future. Whatever his progress and attainments in the divine life, in the time that may yet remain to him, he feels that these, instead of making him less a debtor to the grace of God, will only furnish a stronger proof both of his original and his accumulated obligations. "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof." He clothes it with beauty. He has stored it with all that grows on its surface. He fertilizes and enriches it with his blessing. It is indebted to Him, not more for the preparing and springing of the seed than for the luxuriance of its ripened treasures. The buds of spring and the blossoms of summer are not more illustrative of his sustaining and vitalizing agency than are the rich, luscious, and overflowing fruits into which these, by the processes of his own beneficence, are at length expanded. So is it also with the believer's growth in grace. Thus has he, through faith, his "fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life."

CONCLUSION.

In the manner which, in the preceding pages, we have attempted to illustrate, did our Lord exhibit the contrasted characters of those who received, and those who rejected him. The account which he gave of them must have been felt, by Nicodemus himself, to administer an indirect but affecting reproof for the secret and doubtful

way in which he had sought this interview with Jesus. He must have felt that although he did not absolutely reject the Light, he had not come to it openly; and that, after acknowledging it to be a light from heaven, he had hesitated to admit some of the very truths to which it had pointed his attention, and of which it had furnished the most abundant confirmation. This exhibition of character appears to have been such as to make him seriously consider the features of his own, and how far he might resemble those who "loved the darkness instead of the Light." It would appear that it not only taught him to think seriously, but that, by the blessing of God, it wrought on his soul that momentous change, of the very possibility of which he had recently doubted,—although he did not yet, or for some time afterward, make a distinct avowal of his conversion.

We find, in a subsequent chapter, (vii. 30-32,) that the Pharisees and chief priests sought to apprehend Jesus, and deal with him as one whom they regarded and denounced as a false prophet. The officers, however, whom they employed for this purpose, were so affected by the words which they heard him deliver, that they did not venture to lay hands on him. When asked by their employers why they had not brought him, they could only reply, "Never man spake like this man." These members of the Council were, in consequence, filled with indignation, and, while they gave utterance to their contempt, could not conceal their amazement. It was then that this very Nicodemus, himself a member of it, interposed,—by claiming the privileges of law and justice on behalf of that Teacher come from God, whose disciple he had, as it thus appeared, conscientiously though secretly been. "Nicodemus saith unto them, (he that had come to Jesus by night, being one of them,) Doth our

law judge any man before it hear him, and know what he doeth?" (v. 50, 51.) This was a calm, but just and cutting reproof to men who were accustomed to boast of the law—both in regard to their superior knowledge of it, and their profound respect for its authority; and it brought down upon him a fierce expression of their contempt and resentment,—an expression, however, which the now discovered and avowed disciple of the despised Galilean, seems to have calmly met, and unshrinkingly endured.

Nor is this the only, or the most striking evidence that we possess of the blessed change which was produced on the mind of Nicodemus. At the time when our Lord's disciples, even those who had accompanied him during the whole course of his ministry, had all forsaken him and fled,—at the moment when, having been put to an ignominious death, as an alleged malefactor, his lifeless body was still extended on the accursed tree, did Nicodemus most courageously, significantly, and affectingly, manifest his attachment to him. "Joseph of Arimathea, being" also "a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus: and Pilate gave him leave." His object was to lay it "in his own new tomb, hewn out in the rock, wherein was never man yet laid." In this pious office, Joseph was joined by Nicodemus, who came "bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight. Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury." Such a proceeding, at such a time, and under such circumstances,—when enemies were enjoying their triumph, and friends betraying their timidity and despondency,—affords a striking proof of the nature and extent of that change which had

been produced on the mind of the man to whom Jesus had once discoursed so solemnly, both as to earthly and as to heavenly things.

And have *we*, after listening—often listening—to the same truths, experienced a similar change? Our general views have been enlarged by fuller discoveries than those which were then vouchsafed to Nicodemus. He knew that Jesus had done many miracles. He listened to him as a Teacher sent from God; and he continued to honour and confide in him, even when his death had extinguished the hopes of others. But we know what was to the last unknown to the ruler of the Jews;—we know and are persuaded that Jesus has “risen as he said.” By his resurrection from the dead, he has been demonstrated to be not only a Divinely-commissioned Teacher, but “the Son of God with power.” It is therefore “the Lord from heaven” who here speaks to us, and tells us that we must be born again; that “except we be born again, we cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” It is none else than He who assures us that, by nature, we are the children of wrath, and exposed to perdition; but that He came into the world, “that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.” Already under the condemnation of the Divine law, for each and all of our other sins, we are reminded that our condemnation must be awfully and unspeakably aggravated by the further and heavier sin of *unbelief*—the rejection of the gracious and adorable Saviour. “This,” said he himself, “*this* is the condemnation”—the special and most terrific ground on which sinners can be condemned—“that Light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than Light, because their deeds were evil.” Such

cannot be saved, because they "neglect," and so long as they neglect, and despise "the great salvation."

Considering the unspeakable advantages which we have enjoyed, and are still enjoying, how dreadful must be our case, if we receive no saving impressions from those momentous and blessed truths which, through grace indeed, operated so powerfully on the mind of Nicodemus? Will not that Ruler of the Jews, in this case, rise up in the Judgment and condemn us? Will he not then become a terrible accuser and conclusive witness, if, with all the warnings, instructions, and entreaties which have been brought to bear on us, we neither imbibe the doctrines of Christ; nor seek to defend his cause; nor manifest an affectionate interest in his death; nor glory and rejoice in his resurrection; nor put our trust in his glorious ascension, in his prevalent and continual intercession? Alas! alas! how many, even of those who are called by his name and fancy themselves to be his disciples, have no living connection with Himself and his spiritual kingdom? Shall even the Scribes and Pharisees enter it before us? Is the state of matters still according to our Lord's own representation of the days of Noah? "They did eat, they drank, they married, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the Ark, and the Flood came and destroyed them all." Is it still with many as with the men of Sodom and Gomorrah? They had angels for their visitants, righteous Lot to warn and entreat them to escape for their lives from impending wrath, and that holy man Abraham, the Friend of God, to plead and expostulate with Him on their behalf; and yet they made light of, nay, mocked at, the threatened destruction! Many continue in the fearful pit and the miry clay, while others, in the same help-

less state, are rescued,—the former being left to perish, just because they will not take hold of the almighty hand which is graciously reaching down to give them deliverance. In this great lazar-house of sin, many are dying around us, day after day. Some, however, are induced to look to Him who was lifted up, and are healed. We thus behold, as it were, a fellow-sufferer removed, with joyful heart, from the couch at our side; and yet remain in all the helplessness and pollution of disease, because we will not put our trust in the great Physician who, in the depth of his compassionate love, is saying to each one of us, “Wilt thou be made whole?” Many floating, in their airy and gilded bark, down the stream of worldly pleasure, are easily, perhaps insensibly, drifted into the current of infidelity, and are then hurried into the dark, wide ocean of eternity,—indifferent alike to the warning voice, the pitying cries, and the outstretched arms of those who anticipate, without being able to avert, their doom. How many who have been all their days within hearing of the Gospel invitations, continue their refusal to come to the marriage feast? How many have been standing in the market, all the day idle, and, at the eleventh hour, are still standing there, only because they decline to be engaged as labourers in the vineyard of the Great Husbandman? Even of those who have been *seeking* at times, in their own listless way, to “enter in at the strait gate,” but have never been *striving*—earnestly and perseveringly striving, to enter it,—not a few may justly be addressed in the mournful and alarming words of our Lord, “There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves shut out.”

Surely, then, considering our manifold and peculiar advantages, we are bound to reflect very seriously on the corresponding responsibilities which they involve. "Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required." "If," said Jesus, "I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin; but now they have no cloak for their sin." If we have not been able decidedly, yet humbly, to come to the conclusion that we have been born again, have we not at least, under all the teaching, warnings, entreaties, and encouragements which have been addressed to us, been brought to feel anxious, and anxiously to inquire, as to our spiritual state and our eternal prospects? Can we listen to all that has been said to us on these subjects, by Him who came into the world "to seek and to save that which was lost," and yet go away less moved and awakened than he who came to him by night for instruction? However hesitating, perplexed, and timid we may have felt at the outset, have we, at all events, for certain and in earnest, come to the Light? Have we profited, as well as desired to profit, by the blessed communications made to us by the words of the Saviour? Has the light let in upon our spiritual state and character, instead of driving us away, only attracted us to him the more? Has it become in anywise manifest that our works are now wrought in God? If so, then shall we abide with Jesus through life, cling to him in death, and confidently hope to meet with him in glory. Then shall we confess him before men, at whatever hazard of hatred, suffering, or shame. Hated or despised by the world which despised and hated Him, we shall be approved and loved by Himself and by his Heavenly Father. He will daily recognise in us a growing conformity to his own blessed image, the first lineaments of which are impressed on

every one who is born of the Spirit. And thus ranking among his children, we may entertain the sweet assurance that He will at last, not only confess us before God in the kingdom of glory, but address us in these ineffably gracious and beatific words, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

THE END.

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